

Diary of an Almost-Human

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Summary: Isabella Maxwell is the only descendant of one of Mystic Falls most prestigious founding families. As a child she was taken in by the Salvatore family and 150 years later, the Gilbert's opened their home to her. Hiding her true self, she now spends her days desperately trying to keep her sibling's and their friends out of any trouble that may find them in the form of the Salvatores

1. Chapter 1 - Dear Diary

****A.N.**** So I've decided to publish a new Vampire Diaries fanfic, yay!

>It starts with Season 1 Episode 1 and my hope is to write the whole Season with a new OC - Isabella. I've wanted to play around with how the story could be told from the perspective of a vampire already happily situated in Mystic Falls and whether she'd react well to the sudden appearance of the Salvatores'.
Feel free to drop me a message or even leave a review with any notes and I'll try to get back to you all.

>So here goes; I hope you enjoy. xx<p>

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><p>Dear Diary, today is the day I have been dreading since it all happened. Today I have to smile and pretend that this isn't the third time I've had to move on from the death of those closest to me. Today I will not be staring into a glass of bourbon and wallowing in grief. Today I will start fresh, be someone new; I have to be, for them.**

* * *

><p>With a sad smile, Isabella closed the diary and lifted the family photo from the side-table, stroking the captured faces of the family who had taken her in, she sighed. For them. Placing the frame back in its shrine-like position next to her bed, she stood,

opened her door and started the day:

"Jeremy! Elena! If you two don't get your butts out of bed I will drop you off embarrassingly close to the school entrance in front of everyone!" She waited for a response and rolled her eyes when none came. "Do I really need to break out my Team Gilbert t-shirt and hug you before you go in?" The sound of bed sheets being flung back and two pairs of feet hitting the floors of their respective rooms brought a smile to her face. "Yeah, that's what I thought."

"Oh God, I am so late!" Jenna groaned as she stumbled out her bedroom and towards the stairs. "I am so bad at this! Can you make sure they-" She gestured to the front door as she struggled to hold her shoes, bag and jacket.

"Jenna, go: we'll be fine. I've got this and you have that big presentation today: don't be later than necessary."

"You're a lifesaver, Iz." She shot her a grateful smile before hopping down the stairs and out of the house.

"What do you guys want for breakfast?" She called out to the sleepy teenagers, already knowing what the shared answer would be.

"Coffee please!" Elena responded while a grunt was the only reply from Jeremy's room.

"Right, teenagers plus caffeine, equals a successful first day." Izzy mumbled as she too headed for the staircase.

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><p>"Okay, so I was going to pack you both lunch with adorable notes attached to the bags but instead I figured this would be more appreciated." She held out two handfuls of cash.<p>

"I'm good thanks, Iz." Elena smiled while Jeremy simply grabbed the money.

"Great, so, I'm taking youâ€|" She pointed to Elena. "â€|But you're too cool for the car so you're walking?" She quirked an eyebrow at Jeremy who turned, and started the long walk to the school.

"Ignore him." Elena sighed. "You know he loves you, Izzy."

"Of course I do." She responded as they got into the waiting car. "I'm me, who doesn't love me?" She smiled as Elena laughed what could possibly be her first proper laugh all summer. "So, Bonnie's house?"

* * *

><p>"So Grams is telling me I'm psychic. Our ancestors were from Salem, witches and all that, I know: crazy, but she's going on and on about it, and I'm like, put this woman in a home already!" Izzy laughed at Bonnie's retelling of her weekend with her grandmother. "But then I started thinking, I predicted Obama and I predicted Heath Ledger, and I still think Florida will break off and turn into little resort islandsâ€|"<p>

"Elena?" Izzy cut off the girl as she noticed Elena staring into space. "You okay?"

"I did it again, didn't I?" Izzy nodded as she drove through the centre of town. "Iâ€¦I'm sorry, Bonnie. You were telling me thatâ€¦"

"That I'm psychic now."

"Okay then, predict something. About me." Izzy challenged the girl with a chuckle.

"Rightâ€¦I seeâ€¦" Bonnie didn't finish her sentence as a black blur flew into the windshield of the car causing the car to go skidding into the pavement. "What was that?!"

"Elena? Are you okay?" Isabella turned to the girl who she considered her sister to find her clutching the edges of her seat. "Elena?"

"It's okayâ€¦I'm fine."

"It was like a bird or something. It came out of nowhere." Izzy ignored the girl in the backseat and instead kept her gaze on Elena.

"Really, I'm fine: I can't be freaked out by cars for the rest of my life." She sent Izzy a small smile.

"I predict this year is going to be kick ass. And I predict all the sad and dark times are over and you are ****both**** going to be beyond happy." Bonnie leant forward to grasp their hands. "You hear me: extreme happiness for Isabella Maxwell and Elena Gilbert." With a shared smile the journey to the High School was resumed.

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><p>"Okay so I just have to fill in some paperwork and then I will leave you alone for the day, I promise." Izzy told Elena as the trio exited the car. "Man, I do not miss this." She mumbled as they walked through the mass of students greeting each other on the front lawn.<p>

"Major lack of male real estate so far." Bonnie observed as they weaved their way through the corridors. "Look at the shower curtain on Kelly Beech. She looks like a hotâ€¦can I still say tranny mess?"

"Nope, that's over." Elena laughed and Izzy quelled a smile at seeing her sister so happy.

"Ahh, find a man, coin a new phrase: it's going to be a busy year." Bonnie sighed.

"Is that Matt?" Izzy asked as they all turned to see a very sad-looking jock trying to not glare at Elena as she waved to him.

"He hates me." She declared as he ignored her and stalked off.

That is not hate." Izzy told her. "That's: you dumped me, but I'm too cool to show it, but secretly I'm listening to Air Supply's greatest hits." She joked. "Don't fret little sis, he's not going to cause drama on the first day."

"Speaking of dramaâ€¦" Bonnie trailed off as they entered the school corridors and a very bubbly blonde bounced into view. "Hey Caroline!"

"Elena, Izzy! Oh, my God, how are you?" She embraced the sisters. "It's so good to see you!" She beamed at them both. "How are they? Are they good?" She asked Bonnie.

"Caroline, we're right here and we're fine, thank you." Elena assured the blonde.

"Also, I'm 21 so you don't need to look after me, God knows your mother has been trying to do that all summer." Izzy smiled at the girl. "Anyway, I have to go fill out those forms." She moved away from the high-schoolers. "Have a good day, and call me if you need anything!" She called behind her as she made her way to the office.

"Your sister has amazing shoesâ€¦" Caroline sighed as Izzy's form became engulfed by the crowds of kids. "â€¦do you think she'd let me borrow some?"

"Not in the slightest."

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><p>"Is there anything else I need to fill out?" Isabella asked the secretary as she signed her name on the last piece of paper.<p>

"No, I think that's the last of it, thank you Miss Maxwell, and I'm sorry for your loss."

"Thank you, I mean Jeremy and Elena lost their parents, they just took me in." Isabella adjusted her bag awkwardly.

"Family is family, Miss Maxwell, blood or not." She smiled at the woman behind the desk before leaving.

"Hey Jeremy, good batch, man!" She stiffened as she heard the comment shouted across the hallway and with a frown turned to see Jeremy smirking as he strode into the bathrooms.

"I am going to kick his ass." She mumbled before stalking down the corridor and following him into the men's room.

"Whoa! This is the boys' bathroom!" Izzy glared at the kid.

"Oh please, as if you have anything I've never seen before." She watched as he practically fled from the room.

"What are you do-" She cut Jeremy's objections off as she grabbed his face and inspected his pupils.

"Classes haven't even started and you're already stoned?!" She released his face in disgust.

"No I'm not."

"Really?" She raised an eyebrow at him. "Where is it? If I find it I will flush it!" She started rummaging through his pockets.

"Stop, all right?! You need to chill yourself, all right?" She ignored him and grabbed his backpack off the floor. "Look, stop! I don't have anything on me. Are you crazy?"

"Crazy?" She dropped the bag. "You haven't seen crazy! I have given you a pass all summer but now I am putting an end to this stupidity! You are going to destroy yourself and that'll destroy your sister! Hasn't she been through enough?"

"I lost my parents too, alright!" He shouted. "Not just Elena!"

"Yes, but you weren't in the car! For god's sake Jeremy, no one is saying you haven't lost as much as she has but you need to start dealing with it instead of getting high every time the grief starts coming back!" She raked a hand through her hair as she felt the anger dissipate. "I know I'm not your sister by blood Jeremy, but I love you as though you're my brother because you all took me in when I thought I had no one and then got a lousy deal in return. That is **not **fair but we have to live with it, do you really think they'd be proud seeing you like this?"

"I don't need this." She felt all the fight leave her as he pushed past and left the bathroom.

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><p>She let the door slam behind her as she re-entered the house. Sliding down the wood she let out a long breath as she sat on the floor: Elena was in safe hands at school, she knew Bonnie would look after her and let her know if anything happened, however, the Jeremy situation was getting worse.<p>

All summer she'd been keeping an eye on Jeremy and his method of relaxation; he thought he was being so smart and careful but she'd seen Matt's sister - Vikki Donovan, sneaking out of his room, accompanied by the smell of well smoked weed, on more than one occasion. She'd let him think no one had noticed all summer, hoping he would clean up his act in time for school, however, this morning had proved that was not the case.

With a sigh she heaved herself off the floor and up the stairs towards her room where a half-finished book on the history of Mystic Falls was waiting to be finished; why had she decided that the school textbooks needed updating?

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><p>"Hey Sid." She greeted the barman at The Grill with a smile. "The usual please." She slumped onto the bar stool as a glass of the bars best whiskey was placed in front of her. "Thanks." She glanced around the bar and smiled at the sheer amount of teenagers that were filling the booths. "Busy this evening?"<p>

"I always forget just how many kids are in this town." He sighed as she drained her glass. "And how many of them think I'm going to give them a beer."

"Aww Sid, you know they're just testing you." She smiled at the man before turning her attention to the table occupied by Bonnie and Matt.

"Hey guys." She greeted them. "Is Elena meeting you?"

"Yeah, she should be here any minute." Bonnie smiled. "Is something wrong?"

"Nope, just don't want to be drinking in the same bar as my kid sister and her friends." She joked. "So, how was her first day?"

"Great actually, there's this new hottie and he seems to be into her so I'd say a successful day all round." She beamed while Matt looked more than a little put-out.

"Wonderful!" She smiled at the pair. "Well, have a great time but don't stay out too late: that's my job." She waved good-bye to the pair before exiting the bar racking her brains for a quitter place to drink.

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><p>"Hey party-animal." Izzy greeted Elena as the younger girl closed the bedroom door behind her. "What's up?" She asked as Elena joined her on the bed.<p>

"Nothing I justâ€|had a really great day." She smiled. "I met a guy."

"Ooh, tell all!" Izzy sat upright on her bed as Elena got comfortable.

"His name is Stefan and he's kinda new to town even though he was born here: his family moved around a lot and then his parents died so now he lives with his uncle. We have History, English and French together!" She finished with a small smile.

"Andâ€|?" Izzy asked, sensing there was more.

"Andâ€|he's really cute!" Elena laughed as Izzy whooped. "He's going to the party tomorrow too."

"Party?"

"The back-to-school thing, at the falls." She told her. "Caroline told me to tell you that you're coming too."

"Am I?"

"Apparently, as a chaperone."

"Well, who am I to argue with Caroline Forbes?" The pair laughed. "I'm glad you had a good day Elena; you deserve it." The pair exchanged a smile before lying back on the bed together and staring

up at the ceiling. "So, how cute are we talking?"

* * *

><p>The falls of Mystic Falls were beautiful during the day, but at night, the sight could be described as spectacular. The distant sounds of rushing water filled the air as Izzy strolled through the makeshift car park being used for the back-to-school party. As she wove her way through the trees, the calming music of the waterfalls were soon replaced with Top40 pop and chatting teenagers guzzling beer.<p>

"You made it!" Izzy smiled as Bonnie and Elena suddenly appeared beside her.

"Of course I did; when do I ever miss a party?" She grinned at them before swiping the bottle from Elena's hand and draining its contents. "Just being a good sister." She winked at them. "Is the new guy here yet?" She asked and watched as a blush stained Elena's cheeks.

"You mean Mr Romance-Novel-Stare?" Bonnie teased as Elena's blush intensified. "Not that we've seen."

"You mean you can't sense his presence?" Izzy joked as she tapped Bonnie's temple.

"Oh yeah; psychicâ€|Right, I forgot. Okay, so give me a sec, Grams says I have to concentrate." She scrunched her eyes closed.

"Wait, you need a crystal ball." Izzy handed her the now empty beer bottle and frowned as Bonnie's face became startled as their hands touched before abruptly pulling away.

"What happened?" Elena asked as Bonnie hand fell to her side, her eyes still wide with shock.

"That was so weird: when I touched you I saw this old house."

"What?" Izzy asked, feeling her throat go dry at the young girl's words.

"A house." Bonnie repeated. "There were two men, but it was all so blurry..." She shook her head. "I'm drunk. It's the drinking. There's nothing psychic about it. Yeahâ€|Ok, I'm gonna get a refill." Izzy and Elena watched as Bonnie pretty much ran from them.

"What the hell just happened?" Elena asked in disbelief as Bonnie blended into the crowd.

"You heard herâ€|she's drunkâ€|" Izzy mumbled. "Look, I gotta go, I have aâ€|" She racked her brains for a suitable excuse. "â€|a dateâ€|I have a dateâ€|with a person." Elena frowned at her. "So I gotta go." She began to walk away from her. "Um, don't get too drunk and make sure you call me or Liz to come pick you up, okay?"

"Yeah, sure." Elena responded as she watched her sister head back towards the cars. "Well that was weirdâ€|"

"What was weird?" Elena jumped as a deep voice spoke behind her. "Hey." She smiled as she recognised the voice's owner. "Are you okay?"

"Stefan, heyâ€¦I'm fine it'sâ€¦it's just Bonnie and my sister, they're... You know what? Never mind. You'reâ€¦here." She grinned up at him.

"I'm here." He smiled at her. "â€¦Great partyâ€¦" He gestured to the obviously drunk teens surrounding them.

"Yeah, it sucksâ€¦you don't have to be nice about it." She nervously tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

"Well, I've never really been very good at, uh, chit-chat." He explained as they began walking away from the centre of the party. "I never have the right thing to sayâ€¦"

"Well for someone who doesn't know what to say, you're kind of the talk of the town." Elena joked as they reached a small bridge that was free of any party-makers.

"Am I?"

"Mm-Hmm. Mysterious new guy, oh, yeah."

"Well, you have the mysterious thing going, tooâ€¦" He nudged her shoulder as they stared up at the falls. "â€¦twinged in sadness.

"What makes you think I'm sad?" Elena frowned at the thought; although she had expected the whole back-to-school thing to suck, Bonnie had been making her laugh all day and Mr Romance-Novel-Stare's attention was definitely making her happy.

"Just a feeling." He shrugged.

"You don't want to know, it'sâ€¦it's not exactly party conversation." She told him as she wrapped her arms around herself in an effort to fight the autumn chill.

"Well, I don't think we're technically at the party anymore soâ€¦" He gestured to the lack of people surrounding them and the fact that the music was a distant noise. She took a deep breath as their eyes connected.

"Last springâ€¦" She began. "â€¦my parents' car drove off of a bridge into the lakeâ€¦and I was in the backseat. I survived, butâ€¦they didn't." She returned her stare to the waterfalls. "So that's my story." She murmured.

"You won't be sad forever, Elena." She turned to see the sincerity in his eyes as he spoke and she gave a small smile in return. "I mean, at least you have your sisterâ€¦"

"Izzy?" She smiled at the thoughts of her sister. "Yeah she's been awesome, I mean even though she's grieving too you wouldn't know it; she spent all summer looking after my brother and me till our Aunt Jenna arrived and even now she's pretty much our primary guardianâ€¦she's kinda my rockâ€¦"

The pair shared a smile before enjoying the distant sounds of the party mixing with the crashing water surrounding them.

"I like Bonnie; she seems like a good friend." Stefan noted as they leant against the bridge railing to watch the edges of the party below.

"Best friend in the world." Elena smiled as she raised her cup in a silent toast to Bonnie.

"And Matt, he can't seem to, uh, take his eyes off of us." Stefan nodded towards the blonde jock staring up at them from the river bank.

"Matt's that friend since childhood that you start dating because you owe it to yourselves to see if you can be more." Elena sighed as she too noticed him standing with Bonnie and Caroline.

"And?"

"And then my parents died, and everything changes." She turned away from the small group to focus on Stefan. "Anyway, Matt and I, together we just, I don't know, it wasn't, um... It wasn't..." She struggled to find the right word.

"Passionate?"

"No..." She smiled to herself. "...No it wasn't passionate." She frowned as small veins began to become visible underneath Stefan's eyes. "Hey, um, are you okay? Um, your eye, it just, it's..."

"Oh um..." He turned away and began rubbing them. "Yeah, no, It's um... it's nothing." He kept his head down. "Um, are you thirsty? I'm gonna get us a drink." Elena frowned as he took the cup from her and yet another person left her suddenly.

"What is going on tonight?"

* * *

><p>Izzy groaned as the incessant ringing of her phone woke her.<p>

"Whoever this is, it better be good." She growled into the receiver as her eyes sought out the time from her bedside clock. "What do you mean there's been an accident?!" She sat upright in bed as Elena's panicked voice came through the phone. "I'll be right there!" She ended the call and stumbled out of bed as she searched for her discarded clothes before running out of the house.

* * *

><p>"Elena?" She called out her sisters' name as she jogged through the abandoned party area in the forest. "Elena?!" She searched through the small crowd of people still loitering by the bonfire. "Oh my God! Elena!" She felt the girl crash into her as her arms wove around her back. "Are you okay? What happened? Is it Jer-"<p>

"We're fine." She turned to see Jeremy standing behind her. She

reached out and pulled him into her embrace too as she realised they were fine.

"What happened?" She asked as she released them and they found an empty log to sit on.

"It's Vikki." Elena told her as Jeremy stayed silent. "We found her in the woods, she's been attacked by an animal!" Izzy felt her back stiffen at the words. "She was losing so much blood andâ€¦" She gestured to the ambulance that Vikki was being loaded into.

"Is Matt here?"

"Yeah, he's going with her." Izzy watched as Matt climbed into the back of the ambulance as Elena spoke.

"What about Bonnie and Caroline? Where are they?"

"Right here." Bonnie announced their arrival as she struggled to support a very clearly drunk Caroline. "Will you take us home?" Izzy felt her heart break as she saw the fright in Bonnie's eyes.

"Of course." She stood. "Come hereâ€¦" She pulled the four teens to her in a tight hug. "â€¦I've got you all."

* * *

><p>"Never criticise late night coffee shops, guys." Izzy told the car full of kids as she re-entered the black SUV. "They are a one way ticket to sober-ville." She joked as she handed the tray of coffees backwards. "Now, keep her drinking because I am not delivering a drunk 16 year old to the Sheriff." She pointed at Caroline. "And make sure she knows that if she throws up, she cleans it."<p>

"Thanks, Izzy." Caroline mumbled as she warmed her hands on one of the cups. "You're the best."

"Yup, and don't you forget it." She mumbled as she slowly pulled away from the coffee shop and began the slow drive to their respective homes.

"So, did that new guy show up?" She asked trying to change the subject as Elena and Bonnie pretty much force fed Caroline coffee.

"Yeah, but apparently he only has eyes for Elena." Izzy smiled as Caroline pouted.

"He does not." Elena blushed as she blew on the hot coffee.

"You two did spend pretty much the whole party together." Bonnie pointed out as Izzy wolf-whistled from the front seat, ignoring Jeremy's eye rolls.

"What did you say his name was?" Izzy asked as Caroline's eyes became clearer.

"Stefan." Elena sighed wistfully. "Stefan Salvatore."

* * *

><p>Dear Diary, today I heard a name that has evaded me for 15 years: Salvatore. Why is it, we are always drawn back to this place? Why can't we escape the lure of Mystic Falls?
**

Keeping my secret from Elena and Jeremy is only going to get harder now we're all back especially after tonight's 'animal attack', which is no doubt connected to their sudden reappearance, because the last 145 years have taught me one thing: if one Salvatore brother is here, then it won't be long before the other arrives.

_It's been 15 years since the infamous reunion of the Salvatore brothers and Isabella Maxwell. 15 years away from those I considered brothers. 15 years since it all ended but this, tonightâ€|is just the beginning and I know it's only a matter of time until Damon and I cross paths again. _

_This time, there'll be no destruction, no hasty fleeing from our home, this time; I will protect those most important to me, and I __won't__ let Damon break my family apart and destroy the life I've built here, not again because wherever he goes, people die but not here, I won't allow it. _

Isabella closed her diary and clutched the locket dangling from her neck. The lapis lazuli glinted in the moonlight streaming through her windows as she slid a piece of paper from the back pages of her diary, flipping it, she gently traced the outline of the faded ink before moving her gaze to the image of three people all posing awkwardly for the image while trying to hide their grins:

Damon, Stefan and Isabella - 1860

2. Chapter 2 - The Night of the Comet

Dear Diary, this morning isâ€|different, there is change, I can sense itâ€|feel it. For the first time in a long time there is happiness surrounding me, engulfing me in its warm embrace.

_I can hear Elena getting ready for the day while humming some uplifting tune and Jeremy practically ran from the house this morning to go visit Vikki. Their sudden changes remind me of what it was like before the accident, where Jeremy and Grayson would discuss the result of some game while Elena showed Miranda and I her new cheer moves before they left for school. _

Harmony is returning, and I know it's due to the Salvatore'sâ€|the only thing I'm not sure about it, is whether that's a good thingâ€|

* * *

><p>"Do I look adult?" Izzy glanced up from the newspaper in her hand as Jenna entered the kitchen. "As in: respectfully parental?" She gestured to the midnight blue dress and heels she wore.<p>

"Depends on where you're going." Izzy replied as she turned her attention away from her relaxing breakfast and towards the stressing red-head.

"Jeremy's parent-teacher conference." Jenna told her as Izzy grimaced. "So, hair up or down."

"I'm gonna need to see the options." Izzy said as Elena entered the room.

"Up." Jenna demonstrated as she gathered all of her hair into a bun.

"Sexy stewardess." Izzy complimented as Elena joined her at the breakfast bar/judging table.

"Down." Jenna let her hair fall around her shoulders.

"Boozy housewife." Elena commented with a wry smile as Jenna's frowned.

"Up it is!" She pulled the hair tie from her wrist and began rearranging her hair. "You're feisty today." She commented as Elena stole Izzy's mug of coffee.

"I feel good, which is rare, so I've decided to go with it: fly free, walk on the sunshine, and all that stuff." She and Izzy shared a smile before the elder stole her mug back. "Where's Jeremy?"

"He left early." Jenna told the duo. "Something about getting to wood-shop early to finish a bird-house." The sisters raised their eyebrows at Jenna who slowly caught on. "There is no wood-shop, is there?"

"Noâ€|" Izzy sighed.

"Great." She finished her hair and stared at Izzy who had returned to her breakfast. "Are you ready to go?"

"Pardon?" She asked around a mouth full of toast.

"Jeremy's parent-teacher conference..."

"Wait, I have to go too?" Izzy whined as Elena giggled behind her.

"You're a guardian too." Jenna reminded her. "So, upâ€|" She ushered her out of her seat. "â€|get dressed and be ready to go in 10."

"10 minutes?!" Izzy exclaimed as she left the kitchen. "You're just doing this so you'll look better than me!" She called out as she ran up the stairs.

"Yeahâ€|pretty much." Jenna smiled at Elena.

* * *

><p>"You know, next time I have to act my age, I'd really appreciate more than 10 minutes notice." Izzy grumbled as she, Jenna and Elena exited her car.<p>

"Oh shut up, you look fine." Jenna admonished as she gave Izzy a once over. "10 minutes and you still look amazing; oh to be young again."

She sighed as Izzy struck a pose in her pencil skirt and heels.

"Oh god, my head!" The trio laughed as Caroline's groans filled their ears. "I think my head's about to explode!"

"Didn't get much sleep, huh?" Jenna teased as they walked into the building.

"Yeah, sure, that's why I keep dry-heaving." Caroline said sarcastically as she rummaged for some sunglasses to help ease her throbbing head. "I can't believe I didn't get his number!" She mumbled to herself.

"Who's number?" Izzy asked.

"Some guy at The Grill this morning." Bonnie explained, gesturing to the coffee in her hands. "Caroline met him while I was in the bathroom."

"Yeah, well feel free to conjure his name and number anytime soon, Witchy." Caroline sighed.

"Why didn't you just talk to him?" Elena asked as they entered the school.

"I don't know: I was still drunk!" Caroline pouted as she and Bonnie waved goodbye and headed for their classes, while Jenna and Izzy set off towards History.

"Hey Matt!" Elena called out to her childhood friend. "How's Vikki doing?" She asked as they got closer.

"She's good but apparently a couple of campers have gone missing too soâ€¦"

"She's lucky she's okay." Elena smiled at him. "Did she say what kind of animal it was?"

"She said it was a vampire." Matt sighed, the tiredness of staying with his sister all night clearly evident on his face.

"What?"

"Yeah, she wakes up last night and mutters 'vampire' and then passes out." He shook his head in disbelief as he spoke. "I'm pretty sure she was drunk." He said as they walked towards their classes. "So, what's up with you and the new guy?" He nodded towards Stefan as the boy rummaged in his locker.

"Matt, the last thing that I want to do is hurt youâ€¦" Elena said awkwardly as Stefan turned and smiled at her.

"You know, I'mâ€¦I'm actually gonna go back to the hospital." He said as Stefan began approaching them. "I want to be there when Vicki wakes up, get the real story about last night." He explained before turning, and walking in the opposite direction.

"Hey." Stefan greeted as Matt vanished from her side.

"Hey." She smiled nervously at him.

"I brought it." He reached into his back-pack and pulled out a book.
"Told you."

" 'Wuthering Heights' by Ellis Bell." Elena read the cover of the obviously old book. "You know, I can't believe she didn't use her real name." She recalled their conversation from last night after she'd invited him into the kitchen when everyone was asleep.

"All the Bronte sisters used pseudonyms. It was the time. Female writers weren't very accepted then."

"Where did you get it?" She asked as she turned the fragile book in her hands, examining it closely.

"Uh, it was passed downâ€|through the family." He explained quickly as Elena held it out for him. "I have lots of books, so go ahead: keep it."

"Oh, no. Iâ€|" He pushed it back towards her. "â€|but I would like to read it again." She cradled the book. "I promise I'll give it back!" She beamed up at him.

"Ok." He conceded and shared her smile.

* * *

><p>"As Jeremy's teacher, I'm concerned." Izzy glanced around the classroom as she and Jenna sat in the student's seats in front of Mr Tanner. "It's the third day of school and he's skipped six of his classes." He told them and Izzy felt her eyes widen in shock.<p>

"Mr Tanner, are you aware that his parents died?" Jenna asked as she sat primly in front of him.

"Four months ago, a great loss. Car accident; Wickery Bridge, if I remember correctly. And you two are related to the family how? The, uh, mother's kid sister and house guest?"

"Younger sister and adopted daughter, actually." Izzy snapped as she glared at him.

"Right." He smiled condescendingly.

"Six classes? Are you sure? I mean, that's kind of hard to do." Jenna asked, effectively changing the subject.

"Not when you're on drugs." Izzy felt her back stiffen at his words. "It's his attempt at coping, Ms. Sommers. And the signs are there: he's moody, withdrawn, argumentative, hungoverâ€|are there any other relatives in the picture?" He asked and Izzy felt her eyebrow rise.

"We're their sole guardians." Jenna told him, clearly having enough of his judging comments.

"Wellâ€|could there be?"

"What are you suggesting exactly, Mr Tanner?" Izzy asked as she

glared at him from the plastic seat.

"It's an impossible job, isn't it, raising two teens?" He asked with a dry smile.

"It's been tough, but we're coping." Jenna and Izzy shared a smile.

"Wrong answer." Their smiles faded. "It is an extremely impossible job, especially for two people who have no experience or families of their own, so anything less than that and you're not doing it properly."

"Well, thank you for this enlightening meeting, Mr Tanner." Izzy said as she rose. "Please get in touch if you have any further comments on how we're raising Jeremy and Elena wrong." With a final glare at the History teacher/Football coach, she and Jenna turned and left the classroom, their heels echoing on the tiled floors.

* * *

><p>"He's on the rebound and has raging family issues." Izzy sighed as Elena told her about her trip to the Salvatore Boarding House.<p>

"At least it's an ex-girlfriend. Wait till you date a guy with mommy issues or cheating issuesâ€|or amphetamine issuesâ€|" She trailed off as she listed the finer qualities of the people in her past as she drove through Mystic Falls. "Plus he shared all this with you so being open and honest with you means he's moved on."

"Oh no, Stefan didn't tell me any of this." Elena huffed. "His brother did."

"Brother?" Izzy asked, her eyes wide.

"Yeah, Damon." Izzy slammed her foot on the breaks and flipped the bird to the honking drivers behind her. "Izzy? Iz? Are you okay? I heard screeching and cars!"

"It's nothing, just a blown tyre." Izzy massaged her temples as she reassured the girl. "You were saying? Something about an ex?" She restarted the car and pulled over to avoid the angry drivers.

"Katherine." Izzy felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end as Elena uttered **her **name. "I just can't believe he never mentioned anything about a hard past, I mean we talked all night and he never thought to-"

"You talked all night?" She shook her head clear of the name that had haunted her and chose instead to focus on this new information.

"Yeah, I saw him outside and so I invited him in for some coffee and we just-"

"You invited him in?!" She felt her blood boil: how could she have been so unaware of the fact that another vampire had been in her home?!

"Yeahâ€¦what's wrong, Iz?" Elena asked, concerned about her sister's reactions.

"Nothing, nothing's wrong I justâ€¦need to get this tyre sorted. Speak to you later!" She quickly jabbed at the car's dashboard and ended the call. Sighing, she held her head in her hands, she was right; when one appears, the other isn't far behind.

"_Raging family issues" _- Izzy scoffed at Elena's choice wording: that's not even the half of it.

* * *

><p>Izzy eyed the doorframe of the Gilbert house sceptically as she opened the door. Tearing her eyes away from the invisible barrier that had now been broken by another vampire, she placed her heeled foot inside the foyer and smiled as Jenna and Elena's laughter flooded through the house.<p>

"Well something smells good." She commented as she hung her coat and bag from the balustrade of the staircase.

"We made tacos." Elena grinned as she entered the kitchen and inhaled the enticing smells.

"Excellent choice." She kicked her heels off and joined them at the breakfast bar. "What are we chatting about?" She asked as she loaded her plate with the delicate taco shells loaded with meat.

"Stefan's family issues." Elena told her as they all sat munching at the bar. "More specifically: the fact that his brother was perfectly nice to me while Stefan just stared us down and ushered me out of the house, which by the way is amaazing!" She sung the last part as Izzy swallowed her meal around the huge lump in her throat.

"It could be way worse." Jenna reminded her.

"That is exactly what I said." Izzy agreed as she tried to push all thoughts of the Salvatore's from her brain.

"Yeah, something about mommy issues or cheating issues orâ€¦" She grappled for Izzy's last example.

"Amphetamine issues." Izzy reminded her as she wrapped her mouth around a taco shell. She glanced up to see the shocked looks on Elena and Jenna's faces. "What? I had a veryâ€¦memorable life before your parents took me in." She shrugged at Elena's softened face as the front door opened.

"Jeremy?" Jenna called out to the teenage boy. "Jeremy! Where were you? You left while we were still talking!"

"God, no more stoner stories." He whined. "Look, Jenna, I get it: you were cool and that'sâ€¦cool." He said as he hung over the bannister to speak to them in the kitchen, Izzy rolled her eyes as his obviously stoned state.

"Oh no, no, no!" Jenna strode from the kitchen as he tried to escape to his room. Seeing he wasn't stopping anytime soon, Izzy eyed the

fruit bowl and slowly picked up an apple. Ensuring Elena was focused on her brother and not on her actions she deftly flicked her wrist and listened for it to hit its target.

"Ow! Jesus! How does an apple double as a projectile?!" Jeremy exclaimed as the apple fell to the floor with a thud, Izzy turned her attention to her nails as Elena stared at her in shock.

"Listen up!" Jenna's voice became full of authority as she took the opportunity of having Jeremy stunned on the stairs. "Quit ditching class or you're grounded. No discussion!"

"Parental authority, I like it." Jeremy gave her a 'thumbs up' in response. "Sleep tight." Izzy heard Jenna's low growl as Jeremy continued his retreat upstairs.

"How did you do that?" Elena whispered.

"Hmmm?" Izzy feigned innocence.

"The appleâ€¦ how?"

"â€¦baseballâ€¦as a kidâ€¦I was the pitcherâ€¦" Izzy told her with a smile as she tried to hide her supernatural strength. "You never really lose itâ€¦we'll play sometime." She hopped off the stool, picked up her shoes and followed Jeremy upstairs, cursing all the way.

* * *

><p>"Night of the comet, would you like a program?" Izzy asked the townsfolk as she and Elena strolled through the Town Square, hands full of pamphlets. "So he didn't call, huh?" She asked as Elena checked her phone for the third time in 10 minutes.<p>

"Or text." She sighed as she pocketed her phone and handed a passer-by a program. "But I realized we never even exchanged that stuff. We've never gotten to the texting part."

"An important milestone in any relationship."

"Isn't it?" Elena smiled, grateful for her sisters' support. "The timing is wrong anyway." She sighed as they kept handing out the programs.

"When is it ever right?"

"I'm not ready, Iz." She told her.

"Who is?" Izzy hated playing devil's advocate but she needed Elena to sort her head out.

"At least I'm putting myself out there." She huffed and Izzy raised an eyebrow.

"What's that supposed to mean?" She halted their walk and turned to face Elena.

"Oh come on Iz, we both know your 'dates' are hook-ups with random guys." Izzy pursed her lips as Elena's words rang true.

"So?"

"So it's not healthy." She inwardly scoffed at the fact that her 'encounters' were nothing but healthyâ€|for her anyway. "You need a proper date."

"I'm fine." She assured her. "Anyway, we're discussing your relationship problems, not mine." She nudged her sister as they continued their walk.

"Nope, no more fretting over Stefan." Elena affirmed. "Tonight is about the comet and spending time with you and my friends." They shared a smile before heading into the centre of the square where the festivities were already starting as the sun began to set.

* * *

><p>It always amazed Izzy just how fast the sun sets once it gets going. As the sky turned black and the few street lights through Mystic Falls lit up, the Town Square became a buzz with activity as people congregated to view the infamous comet shower. Izzy practically had to tiptoe through the crowds as they laid out blankets to lie out and watch the sky.<p>

"I got some candles." Caroline handed Izzy a thin candle as she approached the trip of girls. "Here." She lit the protected wick and watched as the light glinted off the glass bubbled around the candle.

"So, did you ever meet Mr Mysterious again?" Izzy asked as she helped light Elena's candle.

"Actuallyâ€|" Caroline grinned at them all. "â€|I just saw him." She winked at them before sauntering off to find her mystery man.

"You know, I think I'm gonna go get a drink before this whole light show starts." Izzy mumbled as the lights of The Mystic Grill caught her eye. Ignoring the disapproving look from Elena, she blew out her candle and sauntered towards a glass of bourbon.

"I'm worried about her." Elena sighed as she and Bonnie watched Izzy try to avoid her heels sinking into the grass.

"I wouldn't be; she's strong." Bonnie told as Elena frowned at her words. "Psychic, remember?" She joked before moving to light Matt's candle as Stefan stopped in front of Elena.

"Hi." He said quietly.

"Hiâ€|" She responded, trying to be as cold as he was yesterday.

"You knowâ€|that comet - it's been traveling across space for thousands of years. All alone." He said as they stood awkwardly.

"Yeah, Bonnie says it's a harbinger of evil."

"I think it's just a ball of snow and ice, trapped on a path that it

can't escape. And once every 145 years, it gets to come home." Elena nodded and tried to side step him. "I'm sorry about yesterdayâ€¦I wasn't myself." She stopped and looked up at him.

"You seem to spend a lot of time apologising."

"Well, I have a lot to apologize for." He paused. "Yesterday, that wasn't about you, ok?" He told her solemnly.

"You didn't tell me you had a brother."

"We're not close. It's uhâ€¦it's complicated." He told as he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly.

"Anywaysâ€¦he told me about your ex: Katherine." Stefan swallowed hard as her words washed over him.

"What did he say?"

"That she broke your heart."

"Thatâ€¦that was a long time ago." Elena shook her head and turned to stare up at the slow moving comet in the sky.

"When you lose someone, it stays with youâ€¦always reminding you of how easy it is to get hurt." She told him knowingly.

"Elena-" He stood behind her, his voice low in her ear.

"It's ok Stefan." She cut him off with a sigh. "I get it, you have no idea how much I get it. Complicated family? Check. Complicated ex? Check. Too complicated to even contemplate dating? Double check." She turned to face him again. "It's ok: we met, and we talked, and it was epic, but then the sun came up and reality set in. Soâ€¦" She blew her candle out and walked back towards her congregated friends a short distance away.

"Okay, so even The Grill is chock full of people!" Izzy declared as she re-joined the group of teenagers claiming a picnic bench. "Can't a girl just drink in peace?" She sighed as she raised her bottle of scotch and drunk from it. "What?" She asked at Elena's sigh of disapproval. "Oh c'mon Elena, loosen up a bit!" She waved the bottle around. "It's comet night: Woo!"

"Has anyone seen Vikki?" Her mock celebration was interrupted by Jeremy.

"You're her stalker, you tell us." Tyler snapped as he lounged on the table top.

"I can't find." Jeremy ignored him and focused on the rest of the group.

"She probably found someone else to party with. Sorry, pill pusher, I guess you've been replaced." Tyler continued.

"Pill pusher?" Elena asked.

"Ask him." Tyler nodded towards Jeremy.

"You wanna do this right now?" Jeremy took a step towards Tyler but was stopped by a strong hand on his chest.

"You're dealing?" Izzy asked in disbelief. "And after we had that lovely chat too?" She raised an eyebrow at him and watched him pale slightly at the anger in her eyes.

"She's never going to go for you." Tyler chuckled as he picked up Izzy's discarded bottle and took a swig.

"She already did." A slow smile spread over Jeremy's face. "Over and over and over again." He taunted.

"Yeah, right." He scoffed.

"You slept with Vikki Donovan?" Caroline sneered. "I mean, Vikki Donovan slept with you?"

"There's no way!" Tyler scoffed again.

"And I didn't even have to force her into it." The pair exchanged glares at Matt frowned.

"What the hell is he talking about, Ty?" The jock asked his best friend.

"Nothing man." Tyler broke his glare and turned to Matt. "Just ignore him: he's a punk."

"You know what, how about all of you shut up and help me find my sister?" Matt asked, done with listening to the bickering as concern for his sister grew.

"We'll check the back of The Grill." Bonnie volunteered her and Caroline.

"I'll check the square." Matt said as he stalked off.

"I'll come with you!" Jeremy offered and began to follow him but a hand on the back of his collar yanked him back.

"Oh no, no, no!" Izzy turned him to face her. "You are coming with me." She glared at him. "Go with your friends, Elena, and stay safe." She dismissed the girl as she nudged Jeremy forward into a walk. "So that's your game now: dealing?"

"I'm not dealing." She scoffed.

"Don't lie to me Jer, you can fool your sister and your aunt, but not me: I thought we had a better relationship than that?" She let her hurt seep into her words and watched him sigh.

"I'm not dealing, Iz."

"Look, I'm not going to give you the tough love speech again, God knows between Jenna, Elena and myself we've covered it enough detail, but I'm not going to let this go!" She raked a hand through her hair. "Look Jer, there are three options here: 1) we send you to a therapist where you'll be forced to deal with it, 2) rehab where you'll sit in group and tell some stranger how you let your life fall

apartâ€| " She paused and watched him sneer at the first two options. "Or, 3) you talk to me and we deal with this between us; no Jenna, no Elena, just me and you." She took his hand and searched for the kid she used to know in his eyes.

"I vote for none of the above." He snatched his hand away from her and stalked off into the night.

Izzy felt herself deflate as she watched him walk away, falling into a bench, she cradled her head in her hands. Leaning backwards into the wood, she focused solely on the sounds around her and tried to isolate Vikki's voice. Having no luck in the immediate vicinity, she took a deep breath and stretched her supernatural hearing as far as she could until she made out three voices on the roof of The Grill:

"I don't need her to be dead, but you mightâ€| " She sucked in a breath as ****His**** velvety voice flooded her senses. "What attacked you the other night." Izzy tuned out all of her surrounding and listened for the very human heartbeat of Vikki Donovan on the rooftop.

"I don't know: an animal?" She sighed in relief as the girl spoke: obviously alive.

"Are you sure about that?" Her captor asked. "Thinkâ€|think about itâ€|think ****really**** hard." Izzy imagined him slowly circling Vikki as he spoke. "What attacked you?"

"A vampire." Vikki breathed out in shock as her memories flooded back.

"Who did this to you?" Izzy sat up straighter as He fished for more information.

"You did." She felt her hands curl into fists as Vikki confirmed her suspicions: Damon had been the one who attacked Vikki, and he was only getting started.

"Wrong."

"Don'tâ€| " Izzy rolled her eyes: Ah, Stefan, so good of him to jump in now.

"It was ****Stefan****." Damon whispered into the girl's ear as they stared towards the teenage vampire. "Come here." Izzy imagined Damon turning Vikki to stare into his eyes as he compelled her. "Stefan Salvatore did this to you."

"Stefan Salvatore did this to me." Vikki repeated robotically.

"He's a vampire: a vicious, murderous monster." Izzy closed her eyes as she heard his voice drip with venom.

"Please Damon, don't do this." Stefan begged.

"If you couldn't fix it beforeâ€| " Izzy heard him rip the bandage off Vikki's neck. "â€|I don't know what you can do nowâ€| " She heard Vikki stumble as she was no doubt thrown into Stefan's arms.

"Your choice of lifestyle has made you weak." Damon spat and Izzy groaned at the fact that that meant Stefan was still chowing down on bunnies and not human blood. "A couple of vampire parlour tricks is nothing compared to the power that you could have, that you now need." His words hit Stefan hard as he realised there was no way animal blood would give him the power he needed to break Damon's powerful compulsion. "But you can change that. Human blood gives you that." Damon taunted as Stefan's gaze lingered on Vikki's open wound. "You have two choices: you can feed and make her forget, or you can let her run, screaming "vampire" through the town square."

"That's what this is about?" Izzy breathed out as Damon's motives became clear to her.

"You want to expose me?" Stefan exclaimed.

"No! I want you to remember who you are!" Damon's voice boomed on the rooftop.

"Why? So what, so I'll feed? So I'll kill? So I'll remember what it's like to be brothers again? Well you ruined that a long time ago: you drove ****everyone**** away including Izzy who stood by you through everything but in the end it was too much, so, you know what? Let her go." He shook his head in defeat as he tried to calm Vikki in his arms. "Let her tell everyone that vampires have returned to Mystic Falls. Let them chain me up, and let them drive a stake through my heart, because at least I'll be free of ****you****." Stefan's words dripped with hate and Izzy felt tears prick at her eyes as Stefan's defeated voice broke her heart.

"Huh." Damon broke the silence that had fallen over the rooftop. "Wow." He seemed taken aback by Stefan's outburst. "Come here, sweetheart." He pulled Vikki out of Stefan's arms and whispered into her ear something that Izzy couldn't make out.

"What happened? Where am I? Oh, I ripped my stitches open. Ughâ€¦" Izzy breathed a sigh of relief as Vikki appeared to remember nothing and instead focused on her wounds.

"You okay?" Stefan asked shakily.

"I took some pills, man: I'm good." Izzy heard her footsteps disappear off the roof and the door swing closed behind her as she re-entered The Grill.

"It's good to be home." Damon exclaimed as he stood on the edge of the roof, overlooking Mystic Falls. "Think I might stay a while. This town could use a bit of a wake-up call, don't you think?"

"What are you up to, Damon?" Ah the multi-million dollar question; Izzy leant forward to listen harder.

"That's for me to know and for you to. . .dot dot dot." She pictured his smirk. "Give Elena my best." Her relaxed demeanour rapidly changed at the sound of her sisters' name: what the hell did Damon want with her?

She extended her hearing one last time and sunk further into the bench when she was sure the roof was clear: what the hell was she going to do?

* * *

><p>"Jer?" Elena called out to her brother as she reached the top floor of the Gilbert house and heard movement in his room. "You're home?"<p>

"No, it's us!" Izzy called out as she and Jenna moved through the room.

"Also known as the hypocrite police." Jenna mumbled as she opened another drawer.

"What are you doing?" Elena asked as she leant against the doorframe.

"I've become my worst nightmare. The authority figure who has to violate a 15-year-old's privacy." Jenna rubbed her eyes as she closed the drawer empty of drugs.

"Jackpot!" Izzy called out as she pulled a bong out of a hiking boot.

"I see the hiding places haven't gotten any more creative." Jenna sighed as Izzy handed her the object."

"What brought this on?" Elena asked as Izzy perched on the edge of Jeremy's bed.

"Your ass-hat of a history teacher shamed us good yesterday." Jenna told her as she joined Izzy.

"You got Tannered: been there." Elena sighed as she dropped her bag.

"Discover the impossible!" Izzy imitated Mr Tanner as she retrieved a small bag of weed from underneath the mattress he was sat on.

"Yeah, thanks: like I didn't know I was screwing up anyway." Jenna held her head in her hands and sighed.

"You're not screwing up, Aunt Jenna." Elena told her sincerely as she moved to sit between them.

"Yes, I am. You know why? Because I'm not her. She made everything look so easy. You know, high school, marriage, having you." They all stared at the photo of Miranda and Grayson on one of Jeremy's shelves. "I can't do it: I'm gonna say or do the wrong thing, and he's gonna get worse, and it's gonna be my fault. It's impossible." She dropped the boot she was searching. "I couldn't even stand up to Tanner: you had to do it." She turned to Izzy. "I just sat there with a blank mind and no experience."

"This is just the fear talking. You're a little scared, that's all." Elena told her as she gave her aunt a side hug.

"We all are." Izzy agreed as Elena released the red-head.

"I have to go do something. But are you going to be ok?" Jenna sent the young girl a watery smile as she and Izzy resumed their search

for various drugs as Elena left the house.

* * *

><p>Elena released a breath as she rang the doorbell of the Salvatore Boarding house for the second time in as many days.<p>

"Hi." She stared as Stefan opened the door and greeted her in surprise.

"Hey."

"Would you like to come in?" He held the door open wider for her but she shook her head.

"The comet's this way." She turned and led him out of the house and onto the lawn. "Sorry for barging in, especially after earlier." She said as they looked up towards the comet moving through the inky sky.

"No, no. I'm glad you're here. The way we left things... I didn't like it." Stefan told her. She took another deep breath and turned to face him.

"See, the thing is, I got home tonight planning on doing what I always do, write in my diary, like I have been since my mom gave me one when I was 10. It's where I get everything out, everything I'm feeling. It all goes in this little book that I hide on the second shelf behind this really hideous ceramic mermaid. But then I realized that I'd just be writing things that I should probably be telling youâ€| She trailed off realising she was babbling about nothing she actually wanted to say.

"What would you write?" Stefan prompted her.

"I would write.." She hesitated before deciding to just lay everything out. " 'Dear diary, today I convinced myself it was ok to give up: don't take risks, stick with the status quo, no drama: now is just not the timeâ€|but my reasons aren't reasons: they're excuses. All I'm doing is hiding from the truth, and the truth is thatâ€|I'm scared, Stefan." She kept her gaze locked on his. "I'm scared that if I let myself be happy for even one moment thatâ€|the world's just going to come crashing down, and Iâ€|I don't know if I can survive that." She stopped and let the silence hang between them for a moment.

"Do you want to know what I would write?" She nodded. "I met a girl: we talked, it was epic. But then the sun came up and reality set in. Well, this ****is**** reality: right here." Elena let his words rush over her as she felt herself leaning in and their lips meeting with a hesitant brush before her crept up to cup his cheek and their kiss deepened.

* * *

><p>Dear Diary, tonight everything changed, tonight I sat back and listened as Damon toyed with Vikki Donovan's life, tonight I was a scared little girl. I have spent too long denying what I am and trying to live a human life and so tomorrow will be different; tomorrow I will not hide in the shadows when the name Salvatore is

uttered, tomorrow I will walk with my head held high and if they see me, I will deal with it. And so I feel I can sum my thoughts and feelings up very simply:**

Dear Diary, it's begun.

3. Chapter 3 - Friday Night Bites

Dear Diary, sometimes I miss the simplicity of my childhood where my days were filled with lessons and games and nothing was boring because that's all we had, but today, in the modern world, I am bored; my days are filled with endless typing on my laptop, as I recount the history of Mystic Falls, and worrying for Elena and Jeremy as the town slowly falls under the Salvatore spell.

I know Elena thinks I hate Stefan and she finds it completely unfounded as I've 'never met him' but she doesn't realise that Stefan is another baby brother to me and my only worry is that his uncontrollable reaction to human blood will harm her.

* * *

><p>"I'm not saying don't date the guy, I'm just saying: take it slow." Izzy advised as she lay on Elena's bed.<p>

"You were the one who said to go for it." Elena reminded her as she pulled various outfits from her wardrobe before rejecting them and trying again.

"I know butâ€|just take it slow."

"What's wrong?" Elena sighed as she moved to sit at her vanity. "You have your worried face on again."

"I do not have a worried face." Izzy's reflection rolled her eyes at Elena as the teen brushed her hair.

"You so do: you bite your lip and frown." Izzy poked her tongue out in response. "So c'monâ€|"

"You're single for the first time in your entire high school career." Izzy said. "It's the perfect time to play the field! Have some **fun**!"

"Oh, because I'm so that girl." Elena laughed as Izzy shrugged. "Seriously, what are you not saying?"

Your boyfriend is a vampire

"It's stupid." Izzy turned to poke through the stuff on Elena's bed-side table.

"Izzy..."

"What?" She asked innocently.

"Spit it out."

"Iâ€|you don't know him that well and after everything that's

happened recently and whatever is going on between you and Matt-

"There is nothing going on between me and Matt." Elena pointed her hairbrush threateningly at Izzy.

"Not now—but you two have a history, and any lingering feelings on Matt's side could be an issue. You should sort all that out first, get to know Stefan a little more and then consider a relationship."

"Says the Queen of one-night stands." Elena raised an eyebrow as she spoke.

"Hey, I have never pretended those were real nor have I ever brought anyone home!" Izzy defended herself. "I'm just concerned."

"And I love you for it, I do." She got up and joined Izzy on the bed. "But I feel good. It's been a hard year, and I'm starting to kind of feel like things are getting back to normal again. And you know what? Stefan is a big part of that." Izzy smiled at her and sat up.

"Okay then: show me that outfit again, I think we need to change the shoes"

* * *

><p>"Good morning, Elena." Stefan grinned at the girl as they stood on the green outside the High School. "Good morning, Bonnie."<p>

"Hey, um, I gotta find Caroline. She's not answering her phone. So I'll see you guys later." Bonnie said hurriedly before leaving the pair.

"Bonnie—" Elena trailed off sadly as Bonnie showed no intention of turning back to them.

"She doesn't like me very much." Stefan commented.

"She doesn't know you. She's my best friend: she's just looking out for me. But when she does know you, she will love you." Elena assured him as they strolled towards the doors. "And the same goes for my sister." She mumbled.

"Your sister?" Stefan frowned. "Your sister doesn't like me? Have I met her?"

"No." Elena laughed at his worried face. "She's just concerned that we're going too fast because we've only just met and"

"And we don't really know each other." He finished for her.

"Exactly." She smiled appreciatively at him. "But, I have a plan."

"Sounds intriguing."

"Are you free tonight?" She asked hopefully.

"Yesâ€|"

"Perfect. Dinner: my house, 8:00." She told him. "You, me, Bonnie and Izzy: you three will spend some quality time and they'll get to see what a great guy you are. Mission accomplished!"

They stood smiling at each other until Stefan suddenly turned and Elena watched a football land perfectly in his hands. Mouth agape she glanced over to an equally shocked Tyler who fell backwards as he caught Stefan's return throw.

"That throw was insane! How did you even know it was coming?!" Elena exclaimed as Stefan waved sarcastically to Matt and Tyler. "I didn't know you played football."

"I used to, a long time ago." He told her.

"Wow, everyone I know seems to have a secret sporting past: you with football and Izzy with baseballâ€|" She trailed off as Stefan shot her a questioning look. "Ask her about it tonight: her pitches are amazing." She smiled at him as they restarted their walk into the school as the bell rang. "You should try out for the team." She told him.

"I don't think soâ€|"

"So, you don't like football?" She frowned.

"No, I love football. I think it's a great sport. But in this case, I don't think football likes me: you saw Tyler over there, and we both know how Matt feels."

"They don't know you. To them, you're mysterious loner guy." Elena opened her locker as Stefan leant against the neighbouring ones. "Wouldn't hurt to be a part of: make some friends."

"Says the girl who spends her alone time writing in a cemetery." He teased.

"Hey, come on. There's more to me than just gloomy graveyard girl." She smiled as she closed her locker. "There's a whole other Elena that you have yet to meet. She was into everything, ****very**** busy." She assured him.

"Well, I look forward to meeting her." He shared her smile as they moved away from the lockers and travelled through the corridor. "And when will that be?"

"Soonâ€|she's working on it." She stopped him suddenly. "And maybe don't tell my sister we met in a graveyardâ€|"

"Not the right impression?" He joked.

"Not unless you also mention you're part of the football teamâ€|" She smiled sweetly up at him before sauntering off towards her class.

* * *

><p>The room was almost dark as the hastily closed curtains allowed

small slivers of light to break through and send stripes of gold into the room. The cool air was crisp on her skin as Izzy writhed atop the soft bed sheets. Her small pants of ecstasy were interrupted by the shrill ringing of her phone.<p>

"Yeah?" She sighed into the receiver.

"8:00 dinner at our house." Elena's voice was crackly as Izzy pressed her phone to her ear.

"Mmmmm." She murmured. "Yeah, sure, whatever." The nails on her free hand scraped through the scalp of the man currently pressing kisses to her supple stomach as he slowly undressed her.

"Izzy?" Elena asked. "What are you doing?"

"Hmmm?" Izzy's eyes fluttered shut as the sensation of lips on her bare skin stole her attention.

"Oh my God! Are you having sex?!" Elena whispered furiously trying to not gain unwanted attention as she loitered nervously on the edge of the football field.

"What's wrong, Elena?" Izzy sighed as she pushed her companion away from her and sat up.

"Dinner: 8:00."

"Yeah, yeah." Izzy sighed. "I'll be there. Can I go back to Aiden now?"

"Uhh, my name is Aaronâ€|" Izzy silenced her companion with a glare and hung up.

"Many apologiesâ€|Aaron." She smirked before flashing him to the wall and pressing her barely clothed body to his. "Now, where were we?" She felt her fangs begin to slide down into view and slowly sunk them into his neck.

* * *

><p>Elena scowled at her phone as Izzy hung up on her. Pocketing it, she slowly made her way towards the group of girls sat on the grass.<p>

"Oh my God!" Bonnie embraced her as she reached them. "You're here!"

"Yep, I can't be sad girl forever. The only way to get things back to the way they were, is to do things that were." Elena painted a smile on her lips. "Oh, and you're coming to dinner tonight."

"I am?"

"Mm-hmm. You, me, Izzy and Stefan." She saw Bonnie sneer. "You have to give him a chance." She sighed.

"Tonight's no good. Have you seen Caroline? I texted her like a hundred times."

"Don't change the subject, Bonnie Bennett! You're going to be there." Elena said sternly as they took a seat on the grassy blanket.

"Fine. I'll go." She pouted. "Isn't that Stefan over there?" She pointed out the figure speaking with Mr Tanner as the football team practiced.

"He must be trying out." Elena beamed.

"Weren't varsity trials last Spring?" Bonnie asked.

"He wasn't here then, so Tanner should give him a shot." Elena mused and grinned when Stefan set off in the direction of the changing rooms.

"Seriously, where is Caroline?" Bonnie exclaimed as they remained sat on the grass while their Captain was nowhere to be seen.

"I don't know: it's not like herâ€|"

"I'll try her again-" Bonnie stopped herself as music blared from the stereo of a blue Chevy Camaro that rolled into the small parking lot.

"Uhâ€|" Elena and Bonnie watched slack-jawed as Caroline leant over and kissed the driver.

"Oh my God, that must be the mystery guy from The Grill." Bonnie said as Caroline exited the car with a smug smile.

"That's not a mystery guy: that's Damon Salvatore." Elena groaned.

"Salvatore? As in Stefan Salvatore?"

"I got the other brother. Hope you don't mind." Caroline smirked at Elena. "Sorry I'm late, girls. I, uh, was busy." She addressed the group of cheerleaders with a wink. "All right, let's start with the double pike herkey hurdler, what do you say?" She began the practice. "And: 5, 6, 7, 8."

Elena stood in the middle of the group desperately trying to keep up with the routine and obviously struggling.

"Elena, sweetie, why don't you just observe today?" Caroline asked sweetly and Elena felt a deep blush flood up her neck as all the girls turned to stare at her. With a nod she left the group to sit on the side-lines. "Ok? Keep going! Ok. Do it again from the top. And: 5, 6, 7, 8."

Elena moved away from the cheer group and crept towards the football pitch. Her eyes scanned the identical uniforms until they landed on the un-helmeted body of Stefan. Smiling, she watched him re-strap the headgear before proceeding to annihilate every other player on the pitch.

* * *

><p>Elena moved around the kitchen preparing dinner as Bonnie sat at the breakfast bar eating chips and dip.<p>

"You explain it. Last night, I'm watching Nine-o: a commercial break comes on and I'm like, I bet it's that phone commercial. And sure enough, it's that guy and the girl with the bench, he flies to Paris and he flies back. They take a picture." She stared wide eyed at Elena trying to emphasise her psychic powers as Elena laughed.

"Oh come on, that commercial's on a constant loop."

"Well, how about this? Today I'm obsessed with numbers; 3 numbers. I keep seeing 8, 14, and 22. How weird is that?" Bonnie opened another packet and poured it into a serving bowl.

"Maybe we should play the lottery." Elena joked. "Have you talked to your Grams?"

"She's just gonna say it's because I'm a witch. I don't want to be a witch. Do you want to be a witch?"

"I don't want to be a witch." Elena agreed as she too emptied to-go food into a bowl.

"You know, putting it in a nice bowl isn't fooling anybody."

"Okâ€|serving spoons." Elena mused. "Where are the serving spoons?"

"Middle drawer on your left." Bonnie predicted.

"Ok, so you've been in this kitchen like a thousand times." Elena reminded her as she opened said drawer and found them..

"Yeahâ€|that's it." She rolled her eyes as the doorbell rang.

"Ok, he's here. Don't be nervous. Just be your normal loving self." Elena breathed.

"Are you talking to me or yourself?" Bonnie teased as Elena threw a hand-towel at her head.

* * *

><p>"Did Tanner give you a hard time today?" Elena asked Stefan as the trio sat at the dining room table, ignoring the empty place set for Izzy.<p>

"Well, he let me on the team, so I must have done something right." Stefan smiled.

"Bonnie, you should have seen Stefan today. Tyler threw a ball right at him, and-"

"Yeah, I heard." Bonnie cut her off and continued prodding at her food.

"Why don't you tell Stefan about your family?" Elena prompted her as an awkward silence fell over the table.

"Um, divorced. No mom. Live with my dad." Bonnie said as she frowned at Elena's topic choice.

"No, about the witches." Elena prompted again but sighed when Bonnie said nothing. "Bonnie's family has a lineage of witches. It's really cool." She told Stefan.

"Cool isn't the word I'd use."

"Well, it's certainly interesting." Stefan said, catching Bonnie's eye. "I'm not too versed, but I do know that there's a history of Celtic druids that migrated here in the 1800s." He smiled as Bonnie sat up straighter, now interested.

"My family came by way of Salem." She told him.

"Really? Salem witches?" Stefan questioned, seeing Elena grin out of the corner of his eye as Bonnie engaged with him

"Yeah."

"I would say that's pretty cool."

"Really? Why?" Elena asked.

"Salem witches are heroic examples of individualism and nonconformity." Stefan told the duo.

"Yeah they are!" Bonnie said smugly as the doorbell rang again.

"Izzy must have forgotten her keys." Elena murmured as she rose and made her way to the door. "Where have you be-" She stopped as she saw who was on her doorstep.

"Surprise!" Caroline beamed. "Bonnie said you were doing dinner, so we brought dessert."

"Hope you don't mind." Damon added with a devilish grin.

"What are you doing here?" Elena turned to see Stefan glaring at his brother.

"Waiting for Elena to invite me in." Damon raised an eyebrow as he spoke.

"Oh yeah, you canâ€¦" Elena gestured for them to come in and moved aside as Caroline bounced in.

"No, no, no. He can't, uh... he can't stay. Can you, Damon?" Stefan resumed his glare.

"Get in here." Caroline waved him in but Stefan stayed blocking the door.

"We're just finishing up."

"It's fine." Elena frowned at Stefan and opened the door wider. "Just come on in." She followed Caroline into the kitchen and missed the victorious smirk Damon sent Stefan.

"You have a beautiful home Elena."

* * *

><p>"I cannot believe that Mr. Tanner let you on the team. Tyler must be seething. But good for you. Go for it." Caroline grinned at Stefan as they all sat in the living room.<p>

"That's what I always tell him. You have to engage. You can't just sit there and wait for life to come to you. You have to go get it." Damon laid on the perfect brother act brilliantly and watched as Stefan glared at him.

"Yeah, Elena wasn't so lucky today. It's only because you missed summer camp." Caroline frowned. "God, I don't know how you're ever going to learn the routines." She mumbled.

"I'll work with her." Bonnie defended her best friend. "She'll get it."

"I guess we can put her in the backâ€|"

"You know, you don't seem like the cheerleader type, Elena." Damon ignored Caroline's mumblings about cheer positions and focused on the brunette instead.

"Oh, it's just 'cause her parents died." Caroline piped up again. "Yeah, I mean, she's just totally going through a blah phase. She used to be way more fun, like Izzy." She smiled until she saw Elena's fallen smile. "And I say that with complete sensitivity."

"Izzy?" Damon asked. "I don't think I've met an Izzyâ€|"

"My sister." Elena explained. "She should be here but-"

"Oh my God, I am so sorry I'm late!" Elena was interrupted as the front door flew open and a pair of heels became visible. "Please tell me you saved some foodâ€|" She trailed off as she noticed all eyes on her, specifically, two pairs of wide eyes. She couldn't move: her feet felt glued to the floor as she took in the sight of the Salvatore brothers in her living room.

"Stefan, Damon, this is my sister: Izzy." Elena introduced her. "Izzy, this is Stefan and his brother Damon." She swallowed hard as the brothers rose to 'greet' her. She took hesitant steps into the living area, her shoulders squared as inwardly she cursed: this was not how she wanted their reunion to go!

"Nice to meet you." Stefan said as Izzy shook his hand.

"You too." She was surprised at the steadiness of her voice. "Elena's told me a lot about you." She saw Elena blush slightly before another voice filled the room.

"Damon Salvatore." She took a deep breath before looking up into his baby blues.

"Isabella Maxwell." She took his outstretched hand, knowing exactly what his next move would be.

"A pleasure to meet you, Miss Maxwell." He bent slightly and brushed a kiss over her knuckles. She slowly let her hand fall from his grasp as she turned to Elena.

"Be right back!" The sound of her heels echoing on the wooden floors echoed through the house as she made her way into the kitchen. Unscrewing the bottle of scotch in her hand, she saw no need for a glass as she lifted the bottle and drank straight from its neck.

This should be interesting!

* * *

><p>Two hours and three glasses of wine later, Izzy found herself in the kitchen staring into the blackness of the night through the window above the sink.<p>

"One more." She closed her eyes as Damon's reflection appeared in the glass pane. She heard him place another glass onto the worktop as Elena also entered the kitchen.

"You know! there's almost no familial resemblance between you two, it's quite remarkable." She felt her hands curl into fists as he spoke.

"I'm adopted." She bit out as Elena opened her mouth to explain.

"Not that you'd know it: I can't remember a time before Izzy was in this house, she's my sister and that's all there is to it." Elena flashed a smile to Izzy who was noticeably tense beside Damon.

"I like you." Damon said to Elena with a grin. "You know how to laugh. And you make Stefan smile, which is something I haven't seen in a very long time."

"Since Katherine?" Elena asked hesitantly, her eyes glancing over to the living room where Stefan and Bonnie were still discussing witches.

"Mmmmm." He hummed in response, his attention once again turning to the tense blonde at his side.

"How did she die?" Elena asked, not noticing the fraught atmosphere between her sister and their houseguest.

"In a fire. A tragic fire." Damon sighed as he smiled sadly at Elena. "Seems like it was only yesterday."

"What was she like?"

"She was beautiful. A lot like you in that department. She was also very complicated and selfish and at times not very kind, but very sexy and seductive." Izzy felt her stomach churn as Damon charmed Elena.

"So which one of you dated her first?" She felt a smile tug at her lips at Elena's deduction.

"Ask Stefan. I'm sure his answer differs from mine." His grin faded. "I'd quit cheerleading if I were you."

"Why do you say that?" Izzy asked: her first words to him since their introduction.

"I saw you at practice." Damon spoke directly to Elena. "You looked miserable."

"You saw that?" The teenager's face fell. "I used to love it; it was fun. Things are different this year. Everything that used to matter doesn't anymore." She explained.

"So don't let it: quit and move on." Izzy's jaw tightened as Damon handed out advice to Elena. "Problem solved."

"Some things could matter again." Izzy responded, feeling his eyes snap back to her as she finally turned from the sink to face the rest of the kitchen. "Quitting isn't always the right way to go: you should at least give it a proper try." She directed her comments directly to him and watched for his reaction.

"Maybeâ€|but sometimes, you just know when things aren't going to work out as planned." He stared into her eyes as he spoke and neither broke the connection until Elena moved out of the kitchen and Izzy turned back to the sink, focusing on the plates in front of her and not the silent vampire watching her every move.

"I'll dry." He snagged a dish towel from the counter and moved to lift a wet plate from the dish rack.

"I don't need your help." She told him and grabbed the towel from his grasp.

"You have a beautiful home." He commented as he walked around the space, eyeing various family photographs and pieces of unfinished homework on the breakfast bar that showed exactly how much of a home this building was.

"Really? Because I think we have an infestation problem!" She exclaimed as she turned to face him again.

"Hope it's nothing serious." He smirked at her as she strode out of the kitchen.

* * *

><p>"See you all at the game tomorrow!" Elena called out to her friends as they all left. "Wow." She closed the door. "That was awkwardâ€|" She fell onto the sofa as Izzy remained at the window watching to make sure they all left.<p>

"Why didn't you tell me you were inviting Stefan and his brother?"

"Because I wanted you to get to know Stefan and then Damon showed up unexpectedly with Caroline soâ€|" She shrugged. "At least we got to know them better, right?"

"Right." Izzy sighed. "I'm going to bed: I'm pooped." She told her sister. "Night." She pressed a kiss to Elena's forehead and climbed the stairs to her room.

Closing her bedroom door behind her, she let out a small growl of frustration: Damon Salvatore sipping coffee in her living room was not what she expected to come home to!

She paced her room until she came to a solid conclusion on how to go forth: propping a chair underneath the door handle, she opened her window and slipped out into the night.

She stood for what seemed like hours on the porch of the Salvatore Boarding House before deciding to enter.

Flinging the door open, she strode into the parlour and around the large sofa until she faced the person slouching in it.

"What the hell are you doing here?" She seethed.

"I could ask you the same question, Izzy." Damon shot her a lazy smirk. "After all, this is ****my**** house."

"Fine, let me rephrase: what the hell are you doing in Mystic Falls?" There was a beat of silence as he studied her.

"I came to apologize: I've been doing some thinking, some soul searching, and... I want to start over, put the past behind me." He told her as he cradled his glass of bourbon. "Stefan's my little brother, and if he wants to live a normal, happy human life then I want that for him. Maybe I can do it, too? Maybe we both can learn to be non-living, living people, just like you." He grinned at her. "Well that's what you're doing, isn't it? Pretending."

"At least I'm living my life and not drinking until the decades blur into one mass of parties and bloodbaths!"

"Living? You call that living?!" He stood abruptly as he curled his hand into a fist and felt the glass shatter between his fingers. "I spent the last 15 years searching for you! And it turns out you're playing happy families in some godforsaken town!" She glared at him. "Nice choice of family by the way: Elena took my breath away; she's a dead-ringer for Katherine, isn't she?"

"Don't bring her into this." She warned him, her voice low. "She's not Katherine and she never will be." Damon shrugged and moved to pour himself a fresh drink. "When Elena told me that Stefan Salvatore and his brother Damon had arrived in town, I ****prayed**** it wasn't you: I hoped that you'd stay away and not bring the Salvatore drama back to Mystic Falls."

"You really hate me that much?" He asked her with a cool stare. "You truly can't forgive me?"

"For over a century, I partied and fed and admittedly had an amazing time with you, Damon." She ran a hand through her long, blonde tresses. "But then I asked for what: A decade of peace? Just 10 years of grocery shopping and town meetings but you couldn't, no, you ****wouldn't**** let me have it Damon." She paced the length of the fire place. "So yes, I can't forgive you because in 130 years I never

asked for anything massive, and when I did, you let me down."

"Izzy-

"No Damon, we aren't going to do the whole big reunion thing because I don't want you here!" Her eyes filled as the words left her mouth. "You're my best friend, Damon, and yes; life has been boring without you, but otherwise, I'm happy: I have a family and a house and responsibilities and I love it!"

"Do they know?" He asked her with a knowing smirk. "Do the Gilbert's know what you are?"

"A murderous creature of their nightmares? Funnily enough I never brought it up."

"And what happens when they realise that **you don't age**? That you can tear a building down in seconds **and rip a man's throat out without blinking**?" He strode closer to her and cupped her chin, forcing her to look into his eyes. "What happens when they figure out that you're a **vampire**?" Her silence was enough of an answer for him. "You and Stefan are trying to play a game that you're going to lose. I'm just being the realist here."

"Lay one finger on Elena or anyone she loves and I will rip your heart out and feed it to a dog." She spat as she pulled out of his grasp.

"There she is!" He chuckled. "There's my Izzy." She shot him a dirty look as she exited the parlour and flashed out of the house.

* * *

><p>Izzy lay wide awake in her bed. She had gotten home when the moon was still high but as dawn burst through her window, she realised she hadn't slept a wink. Her mind was full of memories: good and bad, of times past when she revelled in the mass bloodbaths that followed her and Damon wherever they went, of partying until neither could bear to stand anymore and sitting on rooftops staring up at the stars.<p>

It was true, he was her best friend, had been ever since they first met all those years ago, but Izzy couldn't forget what he did, how he ruined any chance of the normal life she wanted.

She remembered the blueness of his eyes and their contrast with his raven hair and how the face of her childhood friend could change at any moment into one of a monster who could harm her family and friends. Izzy sighed; there was nothing she could do, Damon would cause havoc if he wanted to and no-one could stop him.

* * *

><p>Izzy scoured the parking lot of Mystic Falls High School for a space as crowds of families and supporters piled into the small space for the football game.<p>

"You just missed one." Izzy glared at Jeremy's 'helpful' comment in the rear-view mirror and deftly reversed the car and swung into the space. "You're welcome." He mumbled as he flung the door open and

left the car in search of his friends.

"Are you sure about this, Elena?" Izzy ignored Jeremy's actions and instead turned to his sister. "You loved being a cheerleader."

"Loved." Elena stressed the word as Izzy glanced down at her in normal clothes and not her uniform. "It's just not me anymore, Iz." She smiled up at her sister.

"Okay then." Izzy dropped the subject. "I guess we can just use it as a Halloween costume." She grinned as they exited the car. "Add a little blood, maybe rip it a bit and TaDa! Zombie cheerleader!"

"Thanks, Iz." Elena smiled. "Hey look, it's Stefan!" She waved the boy over and Izzy awkwardly adjusted her bag on her shoulder. "Look at you!" Elena commented as he joined them. "You look hot in your jersey." She fingered the football uniform he wore with the number 17 emblazoned on it.

"What happened?" He asked, noticing her lack of uniform. "No more cheerleader?"

"She quit." Izzy told him. "She's having a new start." She shared a smile with Elena as Stefan glanced to her.

"I'm happy for you." He told her sincerely. "Um, I hope you don't think this is too soon or too weird, but... I, uh, I wanted you to have this." He pulled a small box from his pocket and opened it to reveal a small locket.

"Oh my God, it's beautiful." Elena exclaimed as she gestured for him to put it on her.

"It's something that I've had forever, and, uh, I've never wanted to give it to anyone until now. I'd very much like it if you'd wear it for me, for good luck." Izzy eyed the locket and felt a soft smile rest on her lips as she recognised the scent emanating from it.

"Is that rose I smell?" Elena asked as it was secured around her neck.

"No, it's a herb." Izzy told her as she caught a whiff of the scent. "Probably represents something like protection, right Stefan?"

"Right." The pair shared a tense look as the unmistakable scent of Vervain filled the air. "And, uh, I wanted to thank you for pushing me to try out for the team. It feels really good."

"We're a pair: I quit, you start." She joked as the trio made their way towards the pitch.

"Why aren't you in uniform?" Caroline's tense question stopped them and Izzy saw Elena square her shoulders, ready to defend her decision.

"We'll, uh, leave you two alone." Izzy said as she tugged Stefan along. She waited until they were out of ear shot and turned to him.

"Vervain?"

"Vervain." He confirmed. "I'm not taking any chances, not with Damon lurking around." Izzy nodded at his logic. "I heard you bothâ€|last night." He admitted as they began walking again.

"You did?" She asked, now realising she hadn't even thought of the other inhabitant of the guest house during her little visit.

"Yeahâ€|" They continued in silence until Stefan's hand on her arm stopped her. "It's good to see you, Izzy." He told her and she smiled at him. "I know it's been a while and I know we didn't keep in touch butâ€|It's good to see you." She quickly checked that no one was looking in their direction before pulling Stefan into a hug.

"It's good to see you too, Stef." She whispered into his ear. "So, the football team?" She asked, pulling away. "Can't say I'm not surprised: you've always loved the game."

"It was all Elena actually." He told her. "She encouraged me to join."

"She's a good kid." Izzy said as they looked back to see her walking away from Caroline. "So, hurt her and I'll kneecap you."

* * *

><p>Izzy loitered in the shadows as adults and teens all congregated around a huge bonfire as Mr Tanner took to the makeshift stage.<p>

"So, let's be honest here: in the past, we used to let other teams come into our town and roll right over us!" Izzy rolled her eyes at the football coach come History teacher as he rallied the crowd. "But that is about to change!" She took a long drink from the red cup in her hand and tried to find Elena and Jeremy among the masses. "We've got some great new talent tonight starting on the offense, and I'm gonna tell you right now, it has been a long time since I have seen a kid like this with hands like these: let's give it up for Stefan Salvatore!" She smiled as Tanner pointed to Stefan and raised her fingers to her lips before letting a long whistle as the crowd cheered. "I have only one thing left to say to youâ€|Your Timberwolves are hungry!" Tanner finished his speech as the crowd let out deafening cheers and whistles as the football team dispersed to prepare for the match.

"Tyler, stop it!" Izzy frowned as her ears picked up the sound of Vikki Donovan shouting to her boyfriend. "Tyler! Tyler, stop! Stop it! Stop, you're hurting him!" Izzy elbowed her way through the crowds and towards Tyler's truck. "Tyler! Tyler, stop! Tyler! Stop it! Tyler, stop!" Izzy halted as she saw Jeremy grappling on the floor with Tyler.

"Hey!" She stepped forward. "He's down." She pointed to Jeremy. "Enough." Tyler moved to punch the boy again as he held him down but his movements were stopped as a hand clamped around his wrist and yanked him upwards. "I said: enough." Izzy said coldly as she stared into his eyes.

Tyler shook out of her grip as Jeremy stood. She let the boy go and turned to speak to the younger boy but instead saw him wielding a broken bottle.

"Jeremy!" She shouted as she moved in front of Tyler and raised her hands to block the attack, feeling blood drip from her palm she lowered her arms and stared at the shocked Jeremy.

"Jeremy?" She heard Elena's voice as the girl rushed to the scene. She gasped as she saw the blood running down Izzy's arm as she held the boys away from each other.

"Knock. It. Off." She said slowly to the pair as she pushed them apart. Elena ran to her brother as they parted, Tyler being led away by Matt, while Jeremy stared at Izzy.

"What the hell Jeremy?!" Elena exclaimed as she took in the sight of her brother's bleeding lip. "Put your head up, you're bleeding."

"I'm fine." He tried to shoulder past her. "Just stop, okay?" His eyes begged her as he spoke. She let him go and focused on Izzy.

"Oh my God; your hand." She grabbed her palm and inspected the wound.

"I'm fine." Izzy assured her as she closed her fist to hide the already healing skin.

"Is it deep?" Elena asked as she tried to reopen the hand. "How bad is it?"

"Elena, I'm fine. It's not deep." She assured her sister. "Go back to your friends and I'll go find a bandage."

* * *

><p>"Is Izzy okay?" Bonnie asked as Elena approached her.<p>

"She says she's fine." Elena paused. "Can I ask you a question and you give me a really serious no-joke response?"

"Of course, what is it?" Elena pulled her away from the other cheerleaders and took a deep breath:

"The bad mojo...when you touched Izzy and Stefan you had a reaction and-"

"You know what, forget what I said; Izzy was just cold and your little dinner party plot totally won me over in regards to Stefan-"

"No Bonnie, seriouslyâ€|what was it? Did you see something orâ€|" She trailed off hoping Bonnie would answer her truthfully.

"It wasn't clear like a picture." Bonnie sighed. "Like today, I keep seeing those same numbers I told you about... 8, 14, 22."

"Yeah?" Elena prompted.

"When I touched Izzy I saw this old house and some people but it was so blurry and Stefanâ€¦when I touched him it was a feeling, and it vibrated through me: it was cold andâ€¦"

"And?"

"It was death." Bonnie whispered, her eyes scared. "It's what I imagine death to be like." Elena nodded solemnly before leaving the cheerleader and heading for the stands.

"Hi." She jumped at the unknown voice addressing her. She turned quickly and felt her heart slow down as he realised it was just Damon.

"You scared meâ€¦What are you doing here?" She frowned; almost everyone was in the stands by now, waiting for the game to start.

"I'm hiding from Caroline." He whispered with a smirk. "I needed a break: she talks more than I can listen." Elena laughed.

"That could be a sign..."

"Well, she is awfully young." She frowned at his choice of wording.

"Not much younger than you are."

"I don't see it going anywhere in the bigger picture: I think she'd drive me crazy."

"Caroline does have some really annoying traits, but we've been friends since the first grade and that means something to me." Elena defended her friend as she tried to move away from him.

"Duly noted." He smiled at her. "I'm sorry if I make you uncomfortable. That's not my intention." He tried to stop her from edging away.

"Yes it is." Elena scoffed. "Otherwise you wouldn't put an alternate meaning behind everything you say."

"You're right; I do have other intentionsâ€¦" He held his hands up in surrender before dropping them and leaning in. "â€¦but so do you."

"Really?" She asked, clearly unimpressed by him.

"Mhmmâ€¦I see 'em." He leant in even closer and whispered: "You want me."

"Excuse me?" She took a step back from him.

"I get to you: you find yourself drawn to me, you think about me even when you don't want to think about me. I bet you even dreamed about me." Elena stared, mouth agape at him. "And right now...you want to kiss me." He leant in to cover her lips with his but pulled back when her hand struck his cheek.

"What the hell?!" She exclaimed as he rubbed the area. "I don't know

what game you're trying to play with Stefan here, but I don't want to be part of it!" She moved away from him. "And I don't know what happened in the past, but let's get one thing straight... I am ****not**** Katherine." She shot him a dirty look before storming off towards her seat.

* * *

><p>Izzy strolled along the back of the school as she pretended to look for a bandage for her hand. She glanced down towards her palm and smiled at the sight of the healed cut.<p>

"Here." She jumped slightly as a figure appeared from nowhere. "Heard you might need this." She snatched the roll of bandages from his outstretched hand.

"What do you want, Damon?"

"Just helping a friend: broken glass is a pain to get out butâ€|you seem to have healed fineâ€|guess you're not totally embracing human life then?"

"Go away Damon." She elbowed past him and headed towards the pitch.

"Nice trick with Elena by the way." He called out to her as he followed her to the locker rooms. "Let me guess... vervain in the necklace?" She ignored him and kept on walking. "I admit, I was a bit surprised: it's been a while since anyone could resist my compulsion. Where'd you get it?"

"Your brother." She turned to smirk at him. "Looks like I'm not the only one against you."

"Guess I could just seduce her the old-fashioned way. Or I could just... eat her."

"No." She flashed him against a wall. "Don't you dare lay a finger on her." She bared her fangs as he chuckled.

"No?" He pushed off the wall easily.

"No." She confirmed as she walked closer to him. "Because deep down inside, there is a part of you that cares." She prodded his chest. "I was worried that you had no humanity left inside of you, but all thisâ€|" She smirked at him. "â€|shows that you've still got a little bit of the old Damon inside you and that you haven't actually become the monster that you pretend to be."

"Who's pretending?"

"Fine, then kill me." She opened her arms out to him. "Right here, right now." She smirked at him. "Show me how monstrous you truly are." She laughed humourlessly as he stayed where he was. "Yeah, that's what I thought: because even after I told you I never wanted to see you again and left you in favour of a human life, you can't hurt me because you care about meâ€|and that Damon, is your ****humanity****."

"Miss Maxwell, if you're looking for your stoner brother then he's

not here." Their conversation was interrupted by Mr Tanner. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have a football team to coach." Izzy felt her jaw tighten as Tanner waltzed past them.

"If I have so much humanityâ€|then what's this?" Damon whispered into her ear before grabbing the coach and ripping open his throat.

"Damon!" Izzy shouted as the vampire drained the teacher.

"Anyone, anytime, anyplace." Damon taunted her as the man crumpled to the ground, dead.

"You bastard." She spat as he smirked, blood smeared around his lips while Tanner bled out on the floor before he sped off into the night.

She raced over to Tanner's body and checked for a pulse. Sighing when she found none, she fished her phone out of her pocket and dialled 9-1-1.

"Yeah, Hi, I need an ambulance: there's been another animal attack." She quickly rattled off her location to the operator and tried to figure out why building 8, the 14 on a nearby licence plate and the car parked in space 22 made her think of Bonnie.

* * *

><p>Dear Diary, I tried but it appears as though there's little left of the Damon Salvatore I use to know. I've always known there was darkness in him but the way he killed tonight, it was monstrous. I now know that all traces of good, kindness and love are all but gone and so I'm left with two choices: save him or stop him.**

4. Chapter 4 - Family Ties

Isabella's eyes flew open as the front door slammed. She turned and squinted at her bed-side clock that read 3:13AM.

"Who the hell..?" She mumbled to herself as she swung her legs out of bed, plodded through her room and down the stairs. "Elena? Jer? Jenna?" She called out to the other three residents of the house and frowned when no one answered. "Guys?" She moved into the living room and found the television on but muted. She reached for the nearby remote and flicked the sound on.

"This is Logan Fell coming to you live from the streets of Mystic Falls with breaking news..." She sat cross-legged on the couch as the handsome news reporter greeted her. "â€|the wild animal terrorizing the citizens of Mystic Falls has claimed more victims, local high school students Elena and Jeremy Gilbert." The remote tumbled out of her hands as images of Elena and Jeremy flashed onto the screen.

"Noâ€|" She felt all the air leave her lungs as the reporter continued.

"Police are certain that forensic evidence will confirm that this is

the same animal responsible for recent attacks."

"No! please!" She felt hot tears fall down her face as the television turned itself off. "Oh dear God no!"

"Terrible news!" Her head snapped to face the new person in the room. "So tragic." She couldn't stop the tears falling as Damon sauntered further into the room before crouching before her. "And to think! it's all your fault."

She let out a choked cry before the image became hazy and she found herself sitting upright in bed, the sunlight streaming through her windows. The dream was still so clear in her mind as she wiped the tears from her face and calmed her breathing.

"Bad dream, Izzy?" She scowled as she became aware of the other person lounging next to her on her bed. "Love your pyjamas by the way!" He pulled back the covers a little to admire the shorts that barely concealed her long legs. "They definitely don't require much imagination-" He was cut off as she plunged a concealed dagger into his gut. "All right, I deserved that. But I just wanted to let you know, they caught the culprit: the animal responsible for killing coach Tanner and all those people."

"What are you talking about?" She scrambled out of the bed as he pulled the dagger from his body and dropped it onto the mattress.

"It was a mountain lion! really big one. It attacked a hunter this morning." He told her. "It's all over the news: _Deadly beast captured: and all is well in Mystic Falls_."

"You covered your tracks?" She asked sceptically as she glanced at the clock and realised everyone would still be at home.

"Well, I've decided to stay a while." He sighed as he stood. "I'm just having too much fun with you, Stef and of course: Elena."

"Good luck with her." She laughed, remembering the vervain necklace.

"Well, the vervain might keep me out of her head but then, maybe that's not my target: believe it or not, some girls don't need my persuasion! some girls just can't resist my good looks, my style, my charm and my unflinching ability to listen to Taylor Swift." She eyed him as he moved through her room, occasionally picking up objects before replacing them and continuing his route towards her chest of drawers.

"You're really going to chase the same girl as your brother, yet again?" He ignored her as he opened the drawers and snooped in them. She rolled her eyes when a smirk formed on his lips as he slowly pulled out items of her lingerie. "Pervert." She flashed over to him and slammed the draw, narrowly missing his fingers as it slammed. "Now get out of my house and stay out of my head." He flashed her another smirk before disappearing from the home just as she opened her door and headed towards the kitchen.

"Scum ball." Izzy frowned as she heard Jenna mumbling in the kitchen. "Scum bucket."

"Good morning to you too, Jenna." Izzy joked as she entered the space to find Jenna glaring at the television.

"Oh hey Iz." She greeted her, not stopping her glare at the television, still muttering under her breath.

"Talking to anyone in particular?"

"Him." Elena pointed towards the television, seemingly aware of Jenna's feelings for the man on the screen.

"The news reporter?" Izzy frowned at Jenna's apparent hatred for the man telling the town that 'the animal terrorising Mystic Falls has been caught'.

"Also known as Logan "Scum" Fell." Jenna told her. "Did your mom ever tell you why I moved away from Mystic Falls?"

"No way! You and him?" Izzy exclaimed as she climbed onto a stool to stare at the Jenna's ex. "He's cute."

"He is not cute." Jenna admonished her as Elena giggled. "There is nothing cute about him."

Izzy held her hands up in surrender before moving her attention onto Elena who was playing with a small trinket box.

"What are you doing with that?"

"I went yesterday and got it from the safe deposit box. Mom had told Mrs. Lockwood she would loan it to the founder's council for their heritage display."

"Is that Grandma Beth's wedding ring?" Jenna asked as she and Izzy joined Elena at the table and looked through some of the box's contents.

"Originally it was your great-great-grandma Mary's wedding ring." Izzy told her.

"How much do you think this stuff is worth?" Jeremy made his presence in the kitchen known as he fingered the items. "You know, like on eBay?"

"You're not gonna find out." Elena chastised her brother and snatched the stuff back.

"That stuff is mom and dad's: you can't just give it away!"

"I'm not giving it away!"

"It's called a loan Jeremy." Izzy repacked the box as the doorbell rang and Elena rose to answer it. "You'll get it back."

He shrugged before wandering towards the coffee machine, leaving Izzy alone with the small pieces of Gilbert history.

"Hi Stefan!" She suddenly called out causing Jenna and Jeremy to frown at her, there was a beat of silence before Stefan appeared in

the doorway of the kitchen with a faint blush on his cheeks as he waved hello to the family before being dragged upstairs by Elena.

"Don't forget to pick your suit up, Jer." Izzy said as the boy stared at her, confused.

"Suit? What do I need a suit for?"

"The Founder's Party, it's tonightâ€|remember?" She rolled her eyes as the boy nodded before stalking out of the room.

"Speaking of the Founder's partyâ€|" Jenna returned to the table and grinned at Izzy. "â€|who are you going with?"

"Myself." Izzy told her with a small smile.

"No date?" Jenna frowned; she was well aware her adopted niece was not one to shy away from men and so was curious at her choice to go alone.

"Nope." She sighed. "To be honest Jenna, I don't know if I'm gonna go." She closed the trinket box and pushed it away from her. "I mean, what's the point?"

"You have to go! You're a part of this family and we always go!"

"Yeah because the Gilbert's are a Founding Family but even though Miranda and Grayson took me in, I'm not a Gilbert; I'm a Maxwell." She was pleased with her cover for not going to the party; after all she was sure that this year would be 'the Salvatore show' as everyone vied to get the attention of the two newcomers who happened to have a Founding Family Surname.

"You knowâ€|" Jenna began. "There was a Founding Family called the Maxwell's too." Izzy felt her eyes widen: she'd hoped Jenna didn't know that. "Yeah, the Maxwell Family, I'm sure Miranda and Grayson had some stuff on them." She rose and began to search through a small bookcase. "Who knows, you might be related." She joked and Izzy forced a laugh.

"Maybe." She paused as Jenna continued her search. "Actually, you know what? I think I will go. I'd much rather be a Gilbert than a part of this elusive Maxwell family anyway." She smiled at Jenna's pleased grin and let out a sigh of relief as she stepped away from the bookshelf and announced she was going to do some work.

* * *

><p>Izzy stared blankly at her bed and groaned at the pile of clothes on it.<p>

"Looking for a dress for the party?" She jumped as a voice suddenly filled the room. She turned and sighed when she saw Stefan standing beside her window.

"What is it with you and brother creeping up on me?" She moved to close the door to her room so no one would see them. "What's up, Stef?" She ran a hand through her hair as she rummaged through the

pile of clothes yet again.

"Damon." She snorted.

"Tell me something I don't know."

"Okay, I found some Vervain." She stood upright and frowned at him.

"Vervain hasn't grown in Mystic Falls since 1865." She reminded him. "I helped make sure of that, remember?"

"I found it at the Boarding House." She studied his face for any signs of mistruth before replying.

"Where?"

"The basement." He stuffed his hands in his pockets and cast a cursory glance around the room. She smiled at the differences between the brothers: where Damon had been intrusive, Stefan stood back and just observed his surroundings. "Zach's been growing it."

"Why are you telling ****me**** this?"

"Because I trust you." He smiled at her. "And I need you if we're gonna get rid of him."

* * *

><p>"Hey, did I just hear Tyler?" Izzy asked as she entered the kitchen.<p>

"Yeah, he was just picking up mom's stuff for Mrs Lockwood." Elena told her as she made snacks for her and Bonnie who was sat at the table staring intently at two bottle of nail polish.

"You okay Bon?" Izzy asked as she stole some popcorn and sat next to the girl.

"Delicate Flower or Naughty Vixen?" She held the two bottles out to Izzy.

"Hmmm." She took the bottles. "Tough call."

"Can we mix them?" Elena asked as the trio sat at the table.

"Look at you two, getting all pretty for tonight." Izzy teased as Bonnie emptied her make-up bag.

"Nu-uh, not me." Bonnie told her. "This is all for Elena's date."

"Date?" Izzy grinned at her sister. "I thought you seemed happier."

"I am... ish. Tonight's going to be a good night." She turned to Bonnie. "But don't let that stop you from telling me whatever it is you wanted to tell me as soon as you walked in the door."

"Ooh, gossip!" Izzy leaned in.

"What if I tell you in the morning? I don't want to ruin the nightâ€|"

"Bonnie, out with it." Elena ordered her friend.

"Okayâ€|but it has to go in the vault because Caroline will kill me if it gets back to Damon that she squealed!" The two nodded eagerly. "Apparently Stefan has a very interesting back storyâ€|"

Izzy felt herself sigh as the words left Bonnie's mouth: of course Damon had fed Caroline some warped version of the Salvatore history and of course he had known she wouldn't be able to correct it without exposing herself.

"Do you know what happened with his ex-girlfriend, Katherine?" Bonnie asked them and Izzy resigned herself to acting dumb.

"I know that they both dated her and that's why they have issues." Elena told her.

"Yeah, they both dated her, only she chose ****Damon****, and that drove Stefan mad, so he did ****horrible**** things to try and break them up: he manipulated Katherine and filled her head with all these lies until finally it worked, and she turned against Damon." Izzy felt her jaw tighten but said nothing.

"That sounds like one person's side of the storyâ€|meaning Damon's." Izzy felt herself smile lightly, glad that Elena had enough sense to realise Damon's warped story as utter crap.

"I just wanted you to know."

"Anyway, his past relationships are none of my business." Elena said as she prepped the table for their manicure session.

"Unless he's a calculating, manipulative liar: that is your business." Bonnie shrugged.

"Stefan is none of those things." Izzy cursed inwardly when she realised she had defended someone she wasn't supposed to know. "I mean, you know, he doesn't seem the type."

"How do you know?"

"Trust me, I've spent a lot of time with calculating, manipulative, liarsâ€|I can smell one a mile off." She avoided their glances as she unscrewed one bottle of nail polish and began painting Elena's nails in preparation for the party.

* * *

><p>"I love this whole 'getting ready together' thing." Izzy said as she, Bonnie and Elena shared Elena's bathroom to make-up. "I never did this when I was a kid."<p>

"You never got ready with friends?" Bonnie asked as she applied her mascara. "What about with your mom?"

"She died when I was little and then I moved around a lot so there

wasn't much time for making friends." She sighed as she deftly painted her eyelids with eyeliner. "But I'm so happy that I have this now!" She giggled with the two girls as they all danced slightly to the music playing in Elena's room.

Their make-up/dance session was interrupted by the shrill ringing of the phone.

"I got it." Elena left the bathroom to answer the phone in her room while Izzy checked Bonnie's eyeshadow. "Hello? Hi, Mrs Lockwood. What do you mean? It is? Are you sure? Cause I saw itâ€¦ let me check. Mm-Hmm. I will find it and bring it. Ok, bye." Izzy frowned as she extended her hearing to listen to both sides of the conversation before watching Elena storm past her, fling open the bathroom door that led to Jeremy's room and promptly slap the headphones off Jeremy's head.

"Hey!"

"The pocket watch, where is it?" Elena demanded as Izzy and Bonnie peered into the room.

"What watch?" He asked innocently.

"The one you stole from mom's box." She glared at him as he continued to claim innocence. "Look, Mrs Lockwood just called me, freaking out. It was on the list, Jeremy. And she can't find it, and she thinks she's the one who lost it!"

"Maybe she did." Izzy sighed at his response. "Maybe Tyler took it."

"Don't even play that card, Jeremy, you took it."

"If I go online, am I going to find it on eBay? Is that how you're paying for your pot?" Izzy called from the bathroom.

"Screw you!" He shouted back before begrudgingly standing and retrieving the pocket watch from its hiding place on his shelf. "I would never sell this, ok?" He dangled it in front of Izzy to prove his point.

"Then why did you take it?" Elena asked him.

"Because it's supposed to be mine! Dad said it goes to the firstborn son: his father gave it to him, and now what?" He dumped the item into Elena's hand.

"And he was going to give it to you." Elena stared at the pocket watch in her hand sadly. "Look, Jeremy, it's still yours, okay? Mom promised Mrs Lockwoodâ€¦ what do you want me to do?"

"Just take it and get out." He shot her a withering look as she re-entered their shared bathroom and closed the door behind her.

* * *

><p>The Lockwood Mansion was full of people absentmindedly sipping champagne and mingling. Izzy smoothed her dress down self-consciously as she waited patiently in line to be greeted by the Mayor and Mrs

Lockwood.<p>

"Isabella, darling!" She smiled at the woman as they embraced. "So good to see you again!"

"Carol, Mayor Lockwood." The couple smiled fondly as she greeted them and exchanged pleasantries before entering the party.

"I need a drink." She muttered before heading off towards the bar. "Champagne please." She smiled at the young boy pouring her drink as she was joined by Damon.

"Looking ravishing, Miss Maxwell." He greeted her as she received her glass and sipped the bubbly liquid. She said nothing as she gave him a once over. She hated to admit but Damon Salvatore always did look amazing in a suit especially when paired with a black shirt.

"Damon." She nodded at him before turning and scanning the room for someone else to speak to as he edged closer to her.

"Now, now, where are your manners?" She felt her jaw tighten as his smooth voice washed over the bare skin of her shoulders. "It's rude to ignore a gentleman when he is speaking with you."

"Show me a gentleman and I won't ignore him." She replied, refusing to turn back to him but inwardly cursing when he chuckled and moved even closer to her.

"You and I both know I can be quite the gentleman." Izzy's back stiffened at the mention of the roles they played in their human lives.

"Your girlfriend's looking for you." She nodded towards Caroline who was searching for her lost date before sipping her drink once more and sauntering away from the vampire.

* * *

><p>"The Founding Families of Mystic Falls, Virginia welcome you to the inaugural Founders Council Celebration on this, the twenty-fourth of September in the year Eighteen Hundred and Sixty Four." Izzy caught Stefan's eye as they stood either side of Elena and smiled softly as the girl read aloud the official roster of the first Founders' Celebration. "Look at all these familiar namesâ€"Sheriff William Forbes, Mayor Benjamin Lockwood andâ€"Isabella Maxwell?!" She turned to stare wide-eyed at Izzy who pretended to be shocked.<p>

"Well would you look at that? Maybe Jenna was right and I do have relatives here." She quickly took a drink of champagne.

"And does that say Damon Salvatore?" Her eyes moved through the list and she gasped. "And Stefan Salvatore?!"

"The original Salvatore brothers." Izzy sighed as Damon appeared behind her with Caroline at his side. "Our ancestorsâ€"tragic story, actually."

"We don't need to bore them with stories of the past." Stefan's voice

hardened as he stared at his brother.

"It's not boring, Stefan. I'd love to hear more about your family." Elena gazed up at him.

"Well, I'm bored." Caroline pouted. "I want to dance and Damon won't dance with me." Izzy glanced at Damon who seemed very set against dancing with the young cheerleader before moving her attention to a group of antiques that reminded her so much of the old Mystic Falls. "Could I justâ€|borrow your date?" She smiled sweetly at Elena.

"I don't really dance." Stefan explained quickly as he took Elena's hand.

"Oh, sure he does, you should see him." Damon grinned. "Waltz, the jitterbug, the moonwalk: he does it all!" Izzy stifled a laugh as she recalled Stefan performing all of those dances.

"You wouldn't mind would you, Elena?" Caroline continued smiling sweetly at her friend.

"It's up to Stefan." She gave a tight smile.

"Well sorry but I'm not taking no for an answer." Caroline grinned as he dragged Stefan out of the room and towards the music leaving Damon alone with Elena as Izzy moved around the displays but kept an eye on them.

"I want to apologize to you for being such a world-class jerk the other night when I tried to kiss you. There's no excuse: my therapist says I'mâ€|acting out, trying to punish Stefan."

"For what?"

"It's all in the past; I don't even want to bring it up. Let's just say that the men in the Salvatore family have been cursed with sibling rivalry. And it all started with the original Salvatore brothers." He gestured towards the faded names on the framed roster. "You know, the Salvatore name was practically royalty in this town."

"Until the war." Izzy interjected.

"Yes, until the war." Damon turned to her.

"My apologies, Mr Salvatore, I'm amateur historian and absolutely love all things Mystic Falls." She flashed him a smile and moved to stand next to them again.

"There's nothing amateur about Izzy." Elena beamed. "She's writing an updated textbook for the school." She boasted and watched Damon's eyebrow rise.

"Is that so?"

"I want the kids to learn the truth about what's happened here."

"She taught me all about the Battle of Willow Creek." Elena added. "And that confederate soldiers fired on a church with civilians

inside but the history books leave out that people killed weren't there by accident. They were believed to be union sympathizers. So some of the founders on the confederacy side back then wanted them rounded up and burned alive." Izzy smiled proudly at her sister as she recalled her lesson.

"Exactly." Izzy looked up to see an actual smile on Damon's face at the history she had taught Elena. "Stefan and Damon had someone they loved very much in that church. And when they went to rescue them, they were shotâ€|murdered in cold blood." He didn't miss the way Izzy's back straightened at his words and how her hold on her glass tightened.

"Who was in the church that they wanted to save?" Elena asked.

"A woman." Izzy sighed. "Doesn't it always come down to the love of a woman?" She turned slightly to glance up at Damon's stormy eyes before focusing on Elena. "You should probably go rescue Stefan." She laughed as Elena nodded and practically sped from the room.

Izzy stepped forward and ran her finger over the roster and the outline of the name she inked there so long ago.

"Seems like yesterday, doesn't it?" He said.

"Same people, same party, different dress." She joked, glancing down at her strapless black dress. "Lord knows Benjamin Lockwood would have turned me away at the door if I'd turned up in this." She watched as he took in the short back dress that moulded to her body and finished at her knees.

"Not before my father disowned you." They exchanged a laugh before Izzy thought back to that morning and realised she was joking and reminiscing with the person who had threatened her family.

"I'm going to get another drink." She told him before leaving him surrounded by pieces of their past. She stepped out of the house and onto the back patio, letting the cool night air surround her and flush all thoughts of 1864 from her mind as she descended the steps and moved towards the large covered area containing the dancefloor and outside bar.

She waved to Elena as she and Stefan swayed gently to the music filling the air and smothered a smile as Jenna's resolve slowly broke around Logan Fell. Everyone appeared to be having a good time, her fingers closed around another flute of champagne just as she noticed Caroline Forbes drape herself over Damon again ignoring her mother's glares.

"Having fun?" Izzy grinned at Carol Lockwood as the woman joined her at a small table near the dance floor.

"If I say yes, would you believe me?"

"Not at all." She laughed. "Darling, the whole town admires everything you've done for Jeremy and Elena, but don't you think you should do something for yourself too?"

"As much as I love the idea of a spa weekend, I really don't think Jenna would appreciate me upping and leaving." She joked.

"You need a man." Izzy choked on her drink at Carol's words. "And I think I've seen just the right one!"

"Carol?" Izzy asked as the woman waved to someone behind Izzy and beckoned them over. "Carol, what are you doing?" The Mayoress ignored her and stood to greet her guest.

"Mr Salvatore." Izzy felt her heart sink as Carol was swiftly charmed by Damon. "Mr Salvatore, I'm not sure you've met Miss Isabella Maxwell." She smiled down to Izzy who forced a replica one onto her lips.

"Fortunately I have." He told the Mayoress. "Our younger siblings are dating." He gestured to Elena and Stefan who were wandering off the dancefloor.

"Marvellous! Well I'll leave you two alone then." She waved a small goodbye to the pair before moving onto another group of people.

"Dammit Carol." Izzy muttered as she looked up and saw Damon's extended hand. "I thought you didn't dance?"

"I make exceptions." Begrudgingly she placed her champagne flute onto the table and, aware that Carol Lockwood was watching her every move, plastered a smile on her face and allowed herself to be led from her seat onto the dance floor.

She placed her hand onto his shoulder as another slow song began to play and settled her other hand into his. She suppressed a glare as the hand on her waist pulled her body closer to his until there was barely any room between their torsos and they fell into a natural rhythm in time with the music.

"What are you doing here, Damon? Really? Because you're not here for me and you're definitely not here for Stefan soâ€¦?"

"Can't we have one moment where there are no ulterior motives or feelings of betrayal?" He asked quietly. "Can't we have one moment where the last 10 years never happened and we're just Damon and Izzy enjoying a dance together?" She searched his eyes for any traces of sarcasm or hints that he was deceiving her, but found none.

"One song." She conceded. "And then what?"

"Thenâ€¦" He spun her out and pulled her into a dip. "â€¦we see what happens." She let out a peel of laughter as he pulled her up and wagged his eyebrows at her in a way that was so very Damon that for those 3 minutes it was very easy to forget all the betrayal and heartbreak she'd felt every time she so much as thought of the name Damon Salvatore and let herself be the carefree Izzy of old.

* * *

><p>One thing the carefree Izzy of old would never do is follow her alleged best friend and his date up onto the second floor of the Lockwood Mansion because she didn't trust his motives. However, she definitely would have used the second entrance that Damon appeared to not know about to watch him.<p>

Honestly, she had thought he was luring Caroline up here to stage some sort of distraction by which he dangles her lifeless corpse from the bannister, but using her a lookout? That was unexpected.

Izzy peered around the unnoticed door and watched him retrieve an old wooden box from the exhibit and place it on a table.

"Um, you're not supposed to touch." Caroline reminded him as he rifled through the box until he found what he was looking for. "What is that?" She asked as he held up an amber coloured crystal and watched it reflect the light from the chandelier.

"A very important crystal." He smirked as he watched the light dance through it.

"Well, how did you know it was there?" Caroline had all but abandoned her post as lookout and was now focusing on the shiny gem.

"Because I put it there." He told her as he closed the box and placed it back in its original spot.

"When?"

"A long time ago." Izzy watched him pocket the crystal as he fielded Caroline's list of questions. "And tonight I'm taking it back, thanks to you." He forced a smile at her before taking her arm and leading her from the room.

"Well, what's it for?"

"Never you mind."

"Well, you can't just steal it." She protested as they stood in the doorway.

"It's not stealing if it's mine." She could see that Damon's patience was running out and hoped the girl didn't ask anything further as he led her down the corridor.

"What the hell are you up to, Damon?" Izzy whispered as she crept over to the box to try and figure out what the crystal was.

* * *

><p>Izzy wandered back through the Lockwood Mansion, occasionally stopping to make small talk with other families but always thinking about Damon and that crystal. She entered the formal dining room trying to remember the different uses for crystals when she stopped and saw Bonnie staring at one of the many unlit candles in the room. With a sigh, she straightened up and turned away from the room, completely missing the fact that every single candle suddenly lit itself and illuminated the room.<p>

Izzy let out a sharp gasp at the sight, causing Bonnie to turn abruptly and take in the room herself. Eyes wide, she realised she wasn't alone in the room and before Izzy could say anything, Bonnie fled from the room.

Izzy felt her jaw drop slightly as she realised what this meant:

Bonnie Bennett, descendent of Salem witches, was a witchâ€¦.shit.

* * *

><p>"There is something seriously wrong with you." Izzy turned away from her current conversation as her extended hearing picked up Elena's vice and the fact that's she was very angry with someone. "You stay away from Caroline or I will go straight to her mother, the sheriff. You got it? Stay away from her." Izzy frowned at her words and edged closer to the patio doors to try to get a better sound.<p>

"What did he do?" She heard Stefan approach Elena.

"There are bruises all over Caroline's body: bite marks, and he has her all confused and messed up in the head." Izzy watched Damon stalk right past her as she listened to Elena and realised she as talking about the older Salvatore brother. "You don't look surprised." Elena noted as Stefan remained silent.

"Umâ€¦I'm handling it."

"Handling it? Stefan, you should be having him arrested!"

"Elena, please, I...I don't expect you to understand."

"I don't understand anything, Stefan. So why don't you just clear it up for me?" Izzy kept her hearing focused on Elena and Stefan as he watched Damon grow more frustrated as he searched the expanse of open rooms for his date before vanishing from her eye line.

"Look, there are things that you don't know, okay? Things that I want to tell you, but I can't and I may never be able toâ€¦I just need you to trust me."

"Trust is earned: I can't just magically hand it over." There was a beat of silence before anyone spoke again and Izzy sighed at Stefan's choice of wording.

"I'm so sorry butâ€¦I have to go." Izzy stepped onto the patio and watched Stefan walk quickly away from the party and towards a secluded area of the gardens. Ensuring she didn't encounter Elena on her way, Izzy descended the steps and followed him across the lawns.

* * *

><p>Izzy caught up with Stefan and the air shared a look before silently making their way towards Damon and Caroline.<p>

"Don't! She took it off and I got flustered, okay?! I didn't know what to say. But I swear, okay? I did not tell her. I just told her that you didn't mean to hurt me." Caroline explained quickly as Damon's grip on her upper arms tightened.

They watched as he slowly released her and took numerous deep breaths to try and calm himself down, Izzy raised an eyebrow at his actions: that was new â€" Damon never tried to calm down, he just ripped and mauled until he felt better and then drank to suppress the guilt. She was impressed.

He placed a hand on her shoulder and slowly circled her until she was standing with her back to his chest.

"You make me crazy, you know that?" He inhaled deeply into her hair. He cupped the side of her neck and spoke directly into the shell of her ear. "It's okay. I forgive you."

"I swear I didn't say--"

"Shh, shh, shh." He cut her off and moved an arm around her waist to hold her securely to him. To any passer-by it would appear as though the two were in a sensual embrace but Izzy had a sickening feeling that this was all a ruse. "It's okay." He kissed down the side of her throat. "Unfortunatelyâ€¦I am so over you now."

Izzy watched in horror as he bore his fangs and plunged them into her throat al while holding her close and moving so she was lying in his lap on the lawn.

She and Stefan moved from their secluded spot just in time to see Damon move away from her and grab his own throat as he started to choke.

"What the hell?" He croaked as he fell to the floor. Stefan stood over his brother as Izzy moved to Caroline's unmoving body to check on her.

"I knew I couldn't spike your drink." Stefan's voice sounded eerie against the inky sky as he watched his own brother choke. "So I spiked hers." Stefan raised the empty vial of vervain given to him by Zach to emphasise his words.

Damon closed his eyes in disbelief as he realised all that had happened tonight to get him to this point: the fact that Izzy had likely compelled Caroline to nag Damon about dancing, knowing he would force her onto Stefan so he could be alone with Izzy and Elena, leaving Stefan free to spike Caroline's champagne just before Izzy sent Elena to 'save' him.

Izzy nodded to Stefan who flashed away with Damon's crumpled form and set to work repairing Caroline.

She waited until the girl was on the cusp of waking before appearing to stumble upon her.

"Caroline?" She called out as the girl reached for something in the grass. "Caroline, what happened? I've been looking everywhere for you." She embraced the shaking girl and realised she had likely picked up the crystal which must have dropped when Damon fell. "It's okay Caroline." She soothed the girl who had begun to cry onto her shoulder. "I've got you."

* * *

><p>"Where is he?" Izzy asked as she entered the Boarding House a few hours later.<p>

"Cellar." Stefan told her as he passed her a tumbler of whiskey.

"Can I see him?" She didn't wait for an answer as she strode past Stefan, towards the cellar entrance.

Slowly, she descended the stone steps and walked towards the only locked cell, her heels clicking against the ancient stone floor. Taking a deep breath she moved closer to the locked door and peered through the small bars at the top. She wasn't prepared for the sight in front of her: curled in a ball on the stone floor, in front of rows of vervain plants, was her best friend. She sighed at the sight of his raven hair falling into his eyes as he clutched his chest in agony from the vervain fumes.

"Deadly beast capturedâ€|" She whispered as she walked away from the cell. "â€|and all is well in Mystic Falls."

5. Chapter 5 - You're Undead to Me

The early glow of dawn flooded through the huge windows of the Salvatore Boarding House as Izzy arrived on the doorstep and let herself in.

Sneaking out of the Gilbert House had been more of a challenge this morning after colliding with a half-dressed Vikki Donovan on the landing. Giving the girl a hard look, she had jogged down the stairs and out the door calling out a vague explanation of re-filling her car with gas.

Her customary black stilettos clicked softly against the hard wood floors of the house as she made her way into the parlour.

"Ready?" She turned to see Stefan pacing nervously in front of the fireplace and raised her shirt slightly to show him the gun tucked into the back of her jeans.

"Just in case the vervain hasn't done its job." She explained before dropping her shirt and moving to the entrance to the cellars. "Are you ready?" His face hardened as she unlocked the wrought iron door and they heard the low groans of a waking Damon Salvatore.

"As I'll ever be."

The pair made their way down the narrow staircase and halted in front of the only occupied cell. They shared a look before fully stepping into the small pool of light provided by a nearby lantern and showing themselves to their prisoner.

"Where's my ring?" The first words out of his mouth were groggy and laced with pain as Izzy took in the sight of his cramped body.

"You won't be needing it anymore." Stefan replied as Izzy unconsciously felt for the ring currently hanging around her neck, hidden underneath her shirt. There was a beat of silence as Damon fully awoke and realised his surroundings had changed.

"How long have I been down here?"

"Three days." Stefan and Zach had moved him from the cell containing vervain to an empty one late last night while Damon was still

unconscious. Izzy glanced at the dirt floor and pulled her jacket tighter around her as the temperature of the cell finally hit her.

"What are you doing?" Every word that left the incapacitated vampire's mouth was laced with pain and confusion as his eyes flickered open.

"During the Dark Ages, when a vampire's actions threatened to expose or bring harm upon the entire race, they would face judgment. They sought to re-educate them rather than to punish them." Stefan told him calmly as the words hit Damon.

"You know what will happen if I don'tâ€¦feed." Izzy felt her heart break slightly at his laboured breath and broken speech.

"You'll grow weaker and weaker. Eventually you won't be able to move or speak. In a week your skin will desiccate, and you'll mummify." Stefan paused. "A living corpse: unable to hurt anyone. Ever."

"So what, you're just going to leave me in the basement, forever?" He rolled his head to stare at them through the small opening in the top of the door. "Izzy?"

"Apart from the vervain you ingested from Caroline, I injected you with enough to keep you weak." Izzy told him as Stefan's hand slipped into hers and they thought back to the one thing she had insisted she be the one to do. Filling the needle and then sliding it into the side of his neck had been something she needed to do herself, she had to be the one to knock him out completely, for her own sake.

"Once your circulation stops, I'll move you to the family crypt, and then in 50 years, we can re-evaluate." Stefan promised, all this had been discussed during Damon's three day sleep: Stefan and Izzy would be free to live out their human lives here in Mystic Falls before taking Damon from the crypt and waking him as far away from the town as possible before they pieced together their little family.

"I'm stronger than you think." The determination in his voice broke through their little fantasy as Izzy returned her gaze to Damon.

"You always have been." She whispered. "But you're not stronger than the vervainâ€¦" Her voice got stronger as she remembered the threats to her family and the nightmare he'd inflicted upon her. "â€¦and we both know it. I'm sorry but it didn't have to be this way, Damon."

Izzy and Stefan shared a glance before moving away from the door and striding back into the above ground levels of the home, the solid door slamming behind them as Stefan locked it.

"Everything okay down there?" They both turned to Zach as he loitered at the parlour entrance.

"He's awake. He's weak, but it's probably best to stay out of the basement." Izzy told him.

"He's Damon. I'm not sure how dangerous he still might be." Stefan mused as he moved to check that his bag for school was

packed.

"You're going to go to school today?" Zach asked in disbelief.

"Came here to live a life. It's about time I get back to that." Izzy shot him a small smile. "And Elena, if she's still speaking to meâ€|"

"You should probably call her instead of just showing up at school." Izzy told him.

"What am I supposed to do, feed her another lie? I hate lying to her, Iz!" Stefan whined.

"And you think I like lying to her? To all of them?" Izzy asked incredulously. "But what choice do we have? We came here because we wanted to live as normal a life as we could. You had to know this was going to be a possibility." She sighed as she raked a tired hand through her hair.

"Do you wanna stay for breakfast?" Stefan asked after a beat of silence.

"I'd love to Stef, but I have to get home, before anyone wakes up and sees I'm gone." She apologised to the boy before moving over to him and embracing him. "Stay strong with him." She nodded towards the cellar door. "I'll see you at the carwash?" She asked hopefully before leaving the house and setting off to pick up some gas before getting back to the Gilbert house.

"Stay strong." She repeated to herself in the silence of the car as she tried to push away all thoughts of the vampire slowly desiccating.

* * *

><p>"Morning!" Izzy called out as she entered the Gilbert house, a box of pastries balancing in her hand as she kicked the door shut behind her.<p>

"Are you aware of what's going on upstairs?" Elena asked her as she entered the kitchen and placed the box in front of Jenna who dived straight in.

"Uh huh." Both women answered and Elena frowned

"And you're both okay with it?"

"Well, he could be craftier about it, and at least make an effort to sneak her in and out, but otherwiseâ€| " Izzy finished with a shrug as she poured herself some coffee.

"Oh, and just so you know; I won't be home for dinner." Jenna told them as she picked up another pastry.

"You're actually going to do it?" Izzy laughed as Elena teased;

"You're going to go out with Logan?"

"I'm going to show up and torture him, yes. And have you heard from Stefan?" Jenna re-directed the conversation towards Elena's relationship and not hers.

"Not since he left that very vague message three days ago: _Hi, um, Elena, I, um, have something I have to do. I'll, uh, explain in a few days_." She sighed as Izzy sat next to Jenna to wrestle one of the treats she'd picked up on her way home, from her grip.

"Have you called him?"

"Nope." Elena said stubbornly. "Not going to either." She plucked the pastry Izzy had won from Jenna from her sisters fingers and took a bite.

"Hey!" Izzy protested as Elena licked jam from her fingers.

"And you're okay with everything?" Jenna ignored Izzy's pout as she spoke.

"No, I'm not ok with any of it." She sighed as she finished the pastry. "But I'm not gonna cry about it, either." She reached for another of the delicious treats. "You know, I was going to write in my diary this morning and then I thought, what am I going to write? Honestly, I'm not gonna be one of those pathetic girls whose world stops spinning because of some guy."

"Ok then." Izzy said slowly.

"I'll be fine." She stuffed the pastry into her mouth and walked out of the room. Izzy and Jenna shared a raised eyebrow before shrugging.

"So what are you going to wear tonight?"

"Something that says: bet you wish didn't cheat on me, jackass."

"Excellent."

* * *

><p>"Hey Caroline, how are you?" Izzy asked as the blonde fastened her seatbelt and they pulled off.<p>

"Good." She sighed as Bonnie and Elena smiled softly at her from their seats in the car. "Thanks for picking me up, I don't really feel like driving latelyâ€¦it's like I just can't focus on anything while my memory is so foggy." Izzy smiled at the girl in the rear-view mirror. She really didn't mind picking the girls up and dropping them off, she liked it in fact, it allowed her to keep tabs on them all, especially now there was more than one vampire strolling through town, plus she got to keep up on all the gossip.

"What do you remember?" Elena asked.

"I remember the party. Damon came up behind me, and he was kissing my neck, or biting my neck. I passed out and then Izzy was there." She played with the strings of beads around her neck. "It's like there's holes in my memory lately. It's just weirdâ€¦.Maybe I let him bite

me?"

"Why would you do that?" Bonnie asked.

"Can we just not talk about it, ok? I don't want to talk about Damon: I don't want to talk about any of it. I just want to go back to normal." Izzy nodded, glad that her compulsion had done its work and there appeared to be no memory of any vampire-ish behaviour in Caroline's head.

"What's this?" Bonnie asked as she noticed one of the many necklaces Caroline was wearing. Izzy felt her eyes go wide as she held up the amber crystal Damon had dropped at the Lockwood party.

"Damon gave it to meâ€|or he was going to give it to me. All I know is, it's mine now." Izzy swallowed hard as Bonnie dropped the necklace and it fell back against Caroline's other beadsâ€|she had to get her hands on that crystal and find out what it does.

They rode in silence until Izzy pulled up to the school.

"Don't forget; it's the sexy suds car wash tomorrow. The football team and the band have committed. Well, not all the band, just the ones who could pull off the bikini. You're coming right, Izzy?"

"Of course, Caroline." Izzy laughed at the girl who was back to her normal self. She waved to the approaching Stefan as the girls got out of the car.

"Stefan!" Caroline called out to him before he could speak with Elena. "Where's Damon? He has some serious apologizing to do."

"He's gone, Caroline." Stefan told her, his eyes flitting over to Izzy who was watching the exchange quietly from the car.

"When is he coming back?"

"He's not." He paused as Izzy nodded to him. "I'm sorry."

"This is a good thing, Caroline." Izzy told her as they finally closed the SUV's doors. "He was no good for you."

"â€|I knowâ€|"

* * *

><p>Izzy wasn't 100% sure what possessed her to turn up into the Salvatore's driveway, but she told herself it was for Zach. The man - a distant relative of Damon and Stefan's bastard, human brother, had looked perturbed this morning when Stefan told him he'd be alone with the yet un-desiccated Damon and so Izzy had popped by to check on him. Naturally though, her visit had lasted longer when she saw the man practically lock himself in the kitchen with a shotgun.<p>

After spending all day at the Boarding House, keeping Zach safe, Izzy finally let herself flee the building where no matter which room she sat in, she could still hear him coughing, choking and the unmistakable sound of someone shutting down.

"Zach, I'm going for a drink." She called out to the man who was busy

in the kitchen. "Call me if something happens." She waited for a reply from the man Stefan and Damon told the public was their uncle, but none came. "Fine, ignore me." She sighed before scooping up her keys and leaving the house.

She pulled up to the Mystic Grill at 5pm and frowned as she saw Stefan jogging towards the entrance.

"I thought you were meeting Elena at 4?" She asked him as he slowed.

"Damon just tried to strangle Zach." He told her and she dropped her keys.

"What?! How?! I literally just left the Boarding House!" She whispered violently to him. "What the hell happened?!"

"Zach wanted to say goodbye." She groaned at his words. "I know, I know, but it's fine, I got to him in time and he's ok."

"And Damon?"

"Still locked up." She sighed and thanked Stefan as he picked her keys up for her before they entered the Grill together.

"Stefan?" Elena called out to the boy as she spotted him entering with her sister. She placed her pool cue back onto the table, said goodbye to Matt and raced over to the pair. "What happened?"

"I got held upâ€¦"

"Is everything okay?"

"There was this thing with my uncle." Izzy stood awkwardly to one side as she watched Elena get angrier as Stefan spoke.

"And you couldn't call and tell me that you were going to be an hour late?!" She exclaimed.

"Ok, you kids have fun." Izzy interrupted Elena's rant and tried to pass them when a man suddenly stopped in front of her. "Excuse meâ€¦" She said but he wouldn't move. "Sir?"

"I know you." She looked up and stared at the old man. "My God!"

"I'm sorry?"

"I know you!" He glanced over to Stefan. "I know you as well!" He stared at them both. "How can it be?" He took in their young bodies and faces.

"I think you have the wrong people, Sir." Izzy said gently, trying to push down her internal panic as she began to vaguely recollect the man from a past visit to the town.

"You haven't aged a day!"

"I'm sorry, you have the wrong person, excuse me." Izzy pushed past the man and strode to the bar as Stefan and Elena left. She downed

her first drink in one and spent the next hour trying to ignore the eyes staring into the back of head as the old man tried to figure her out.

As she left the bar, pointedly ignoring the old man, she waved hello to Jenna as she approached her date and frowned at the sight of Logan Fell springing away from the Sheriff.

* * *

><p>As Izzy closed the door behind her, she rested her head against the smooth wood and sighed: she really should have checked into the people still living in Mystic Falls that could recognise her, but, she reasoned that she could discover a long lost ancestor from her research and pass the recognition off as her looking like a past relative.<p>

Pushing herself off the door, she moved to the bottom of the stairs but frowned when she heard laughter coming from the kitchen, accompanied by the smell of a recipe she knew well.

"Mmmm Chicken Parmesan." She sniffed the air as she pushed open the doors to the kitchen but stopped when she saw Stefan and Elena sitting together at the table, mid conversation. "Oopsâ€|sorry guys." She backed out of the room and began closing the double doors when Stefan spoke;

"There's extra by the stove." He laughed as her eyes lit up. "You're more than welcome." She bit her lip before flinging the doors open and making a bee-line for the extra plate.

"Oh my God!" She moaned as she took a bite. "If you don't date him, I will." She joked to her sister as she winked at Stefan and left the room, still clutching the plate.

She walked slowly up the stairs, being careful to not drop anything off her plate, when she encountered Jeremy on the landing.

"It was very nice what you did for Stefan and Elena." She smiled at him. "Very romantic."

"Well, I'm feeling romantic." His eyes flickered over to his bedroom where Izzy could hear Vikki wandering around.

"Jerâ€|" She stopped him from going back into the room. "Justâ€|just promise me you're being careful." He smiled at her before pressing a quick kiss to her cheek.

* * *

><p>"Soooooâ€|" Izzy grinned at Elena as the girl bounded up the stairs after Stefan left. "How'd it go?" She laughed when the girl all but ran into Izzy's room and shut the door so they could gossip.<p>

"His favourite book is 'The Great Gatsby', and he loves 'Seinfeld' and 'I Love Lucy'. He's a huge Scorsese fan and his favourite film is 'Taxi Driver'." Izzy flopped onto Elena's bed as the girl told her all she could about Stefan. "Loves music, like all music, even Miley. Food wise, he really loves garlic." Izzy laughed at that one; trust

Stefan to try and dispel any vampire queries before the girl even had them.

"Jeesh, is that all? You mean he didn't volunteer any DNA while he was at it?" Izzy joked as Elena joined her on the bed.

"He told me all about Katherineâ€¦" She told her quietly. Izzy swallowed hard before speaking;

"What did he say?"

"That she was amazing." Elena sighed. "But also impatient, entitled and selfish."

"Sounds right." Izzy mumbled.

"What?"

"Nothing, carry on."

He said that he doesn't know who was with her first: him or Damon, but that he did do things he wasn't proud of and he regrets not being able to make it right before she died." She paused. "He admits he misses her but assures me he's over her."

"Then he must be." Izzy reasoned. "And if she's not around anymore, then you have nothing to worry about."

"Exactly." She smiled. "Plus he made Chicken Parmesan because he knew it was one of my favourites!" She sighed blissfully. "And it was amazing!"

"I know." Izzy grinned.

"He's got Italian roots too! Although I guess I should have guessed that with the last name 'Salvatoreâ€¦'" She paused. "He can even make his own homemade mozzarella." Izzy smiled at the glow coming from Elena as she spoke about Stefan and was glad that he'd finally decided to open up a little to the girl.

"Anything else?"

"We kissed!"

* * *

><p>Once Izzy had milked Elena for all she could about Stefan and their date, she let out a small yawn of contentedness, happy that all was apparently rosy for Elena.<p>

"Hey, what's all this?" Izzy hadn't noticed Elena going through the numerous boxes lying on the floor of her room. "Census records?" Izzy remained silent as she tried to think of an explanation for the data she had been slowly collecting. She racked her brains for something to say when she remembered something Elena had shared about Stefan.

"Italian roots!" She blurted out and the girl frowned at her. "My ancestors were Italian." She explained quickly. "I've been doing some digging since the Founders Party where you found that guest record

with Isabella Maxwell on."

"And?"

"And it turns out that I'm part of the original Founding Family." She smiled. "The Isabella Maxwell you found is some distant Great-Grandmother whose maternal ancestors were from Italy. They travelled over with the original Salvatore settlers and the Isabella Maxwell from 1864 grew up with the original Salvatore brothers after their families finally settled in Mystic Falls." Izzy let all of this out in one breath and felt a weight lift from her shoulders at the fact that everything she'd told was mostly true and she'd finally been able to share something about herself, her true self, with the girl she considered her sister.

"Wow." Elena breathed. "And then what happened?"

"Well, um, when Damon and Stefan Salvatore were killed, it was reported that she found their bodies and raised the alarm. People say that pretty soon after that there was a third set of gunshots but by the time people got to the boys she was gone and her body was never found so all records of Isabella Maxwell end there." She told her. "She never married anyone from Mystic Falls and so we can assume she either fled once her best friends had been murdered and she reported it, or she was gunned down with them and hidden before anyone found her." She felt tears fill her eyes. "Sad, isn't it?"

"But if you're her descendent, then she'd had to have survived?" Elena asked, seeing her sister get visibly upset retelling the story. "Right?"

"Right." Izzy agreed as she wiped her eyes. "She must have lived and gotten married and had a family." She smiled at the girl as she ran her fingers over the concealed ring she was still wearing around her neck. "A healthy, normal family."

* * *

><p>"No friend discounts, no freebies and no 'pay ya later': we are not running a charity here." Caroline's strict instructions carried across the school parking lot as she prepared Elena for her shift on the money table.<p>

"No we are not." The girl agreed as Caroline handed over the key to the safe box. As the pair set up the small stand, the rest of the student body set up the 'Sexy Suds Car Wash' as the first of the day's cars pulled in.

"Hi." Elena glanced up from the table and broke into a grin when her eyes landed on a nervous looking Stefan.

"Hey." She stood and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

"The event is called 'Sexy Suds', you know." Caroline snidely commented to the couple who glanced down at their clothing before adjusting her pink halter-neck bikini and sauntering off.

"Did we just get scolded?" Stefan laughed as he took in the fact that he was the only male student wearing jeans and t-shirt with a jacket on top.

"And judged." Elena added as she picked at her own jumper covering her vest and shorts.

"Wow." Stefan mused.

"I'm sorry, but I guess you're going to have to take that off." Elena grinned up at Stefan as she took advantage of Caroline's words and pointed coyly to his jacket and shirt.

"I think you have to go first." He countered with a smirk. She paused at his words but felt a smirk pull at her own lips as she tugged the hem of her jumper up and over her head, all while maintaining her best 'sexy' grin until the material caught in her hair.

"Okâ€|ummâ€|" she pulled at the material but it refused to come free. She felt her shoulders slump as Stefan's hands covered her own and helped free her. "Sorry." Her grin faded as the material came free. "So sexy." She said sarcastically as she took the jumper from his hands and glared at it. "Ugh."

"I disagree." Stefan told her as he placed a finger under chin and lifted it so their eyes met. "Very sexy." He leant in and captured her lips, feeling her smile return.

"Elena! Stefan!" The couple broke apart at Bonnie's call and begrudgingly joined her as a new car pulled up and they picked up freshly filled buckets of soapy water and began washing the vehicle.

* * *

><p>"You're getting soap in that." Elena pointed towards the large ring on Stefan's right hand as they soaped up the hood of the SUV Izzy had pulled up in only moments earlier.<p>

"Oh its fine." Stefan told her as he glanced down at the ring.

"I noticed that Damon has one too." Elena commented as she abandoned her cloth and moved to join Stefan on the other side of the car. "Is there a story behind it?"

"Yeah, it's the family crest from the Italian Renaissance." He told her as she took his hand and traced the intricate pattern.

"It looks similar to this locket that Izzy always wears." She observed as she stared at the pattern. "But I guess that makes sense, you know because of the history of your families." She looked up at him expectantly.

"History?" He asked, trying to stop panic flooding his eyes. Had Izzy told her all about their secret? Had she explained the significance of the rings and her locket and why they looked the same?

"Yeah, you know: your and her ancestors came over from Italy together and ended up founding the town together." She told him. "And that led to the Salvatore's and Isabella Maxwell from 1864, growing up together."

"Oh, thatâ€|yeah of courseâ€|makes sense that the locket is similar." He smiled at her gently, relieved their secret was intact and Izzy had thought quickly to produce a cover story.

"What's the stone?" She asked. "It's beautiful."

"It's lapis lazuli." He said as he ran his own fingers over the smooth navy stone.

"Well it's pretty." She grinned as she dropped his hand and resumed soaping her sisters' car. "You should really take it off." She said as she watched him continue to stare at the ring that obviously meant a lot to him in the same way that Izzy was never without her locket. "I could put it in my bag?" She offered.

"Noâ€|it'sâ€|it's fine, really." He smiled gratefully at her. "Thanks though."

"Ok." She shrugged. "I'm gonna get some towels." She dropped her cloth into a nearby bucket and practically skipped off.

Stefan returned his gaze to the ring that had sat on his hand for over 140 years and smiled at the fact that Izzy had chosen to hide Damon's daylight ring so close to her own protective stone. He had known that desiccating Damon would be harder on her than him but they both agreed that it was for the best as he'd gotten out of control.

"How's my car doing?" Izzy broke him out of his reverie as she approached. "I've let it get as filthy as possible so I get my money's worth today." She joked.

"Well I'm definitely going to have to use a level of strength that could be described as supernatural, to get through the dirt." He winked as she laughed.

* * *

><p>Elena relieved Caroline of her shift on the money table as the blonde went in search of more towels. She happily filed the money tin as the townsfolk passed through the car wash.<p>

"That'll be \$20." She told a waiting man. "Hey, I saw you last night." She said as she took the \$20 bill and recognised him as the man who spoke with Stefan and Izzy at the Grill. "You were talking to my sister and a friend of mine." She reminded him as she pointed out Izzy and Stefan chatting by the woman's car.

"Well Iâ€|I thought I knew them." He explained.

"Isabella Maxwell and Stefan Salvatore." She told him as he stared at the pair across the car park.

"Nah, it can't be: it's just my mind playing tricks on me."

"Where do you think you've seen them before?" She asked; her interest piqued.

"When I first moved here, I stayed at the Salvatore Boarding house." He told her. "Stefan was just passing through to visit his uncle. I

mean, none of us knew he was even here until the attack."

"The attack?"

"His uncle got killed: mauled by an animal in the woods."

"Uncle Zach?" She asked, the man shook his head.

"Joseph."

"I'm sorry, sir, I don't think I'm familiar with the story." Elena said as her brow furrowed: another uncle?

"Oh how could you? I mean, this happened years ago!" He told her before moving away from the stand and back towards his car. Elena paused in her seat before racing after him

"Excuse me." She called out and the man stopped. "Um, are you sure that the people that you saw, that you knew, their names were Stefan Salvatore and Isabella Maxwell?"

"Yes." He nodded. "I remember the ring and her locket. Stefan was visiting his uncle and then his brother showed up-"

"Damon?" She interrupted.

"Yeah: Stefan and Damon Salvatore." He smiled at some memory. "Damon was the one with Isabella; they were pretty close, made a good looking couple but insisted they were just close friends." He smiled at her. "I'd have believed it too if it wasn't for the fact that her locket was identical to his ring, and I mean identical."

"When was this?" She whispered as she realised that he was right; Izzy's locket wasn't just similar to Stefan's but identical, just as the man had said.

"It was early June." He said. "1953." He paused and thought harder. "Yeah, June 1953."

* * *

><p>"Hey Jenna." Izzy greeted the red-head as she sat next to her on a picnic bench. "Thought your car was done about an hour ago?"<p>

"Shhhh." Jenna silenced her. "Don't say that so loud." Her eyes flickered over to the news van and settled on the smiling form of Logan Fell as he told the camera about the car wash.

"Aww does Jenna have a crush?" Izzy laughed at the woman.

"No!" She protested, her raised voice earning them a glare from the cameraman. "I'm justâ€¦learning how the industry works."

"Mm-hmmm, sure." The blonde teased as Logan wandered over. "Hi Logan." She waved to the news presenter.

"Hi." He smiled at the two women. "Izzy, right?"

"Right." She answered just as Elena came into view and frowned at

them.

"Your car was done ages ago." She told Jenna who sighed. "Hi Logan."

"Elena." He smiled at the girl who joined the women at the picnic table. "I think the last time I spoke to you, you were nine."

"Your emotional maturity level when we were together." Jenna deadpanned.

"Ouch." He feigned hurt. "And here I thought we were making progress."

"Is he enough in your good graces that I can ask for a favour?" Elena asked Jenna, avoiding eye contact with Izzy.

"If I do her a favour, will I get back in your good graces?" Logan also questioned the red-head with a smirk.

"Uhâ€¦" Jenna glanced between the two. "â€¦a very reluctant maybe to bothâ€¦"

"Done." Logan grinned. "Wait, one condition; dinner, tonight, your house."

"Fine." Jenna agreed. "But you're eating leftovers." She smirked as she rose from the bench and sauntered off.

"What do you need?" Logan turned his attention to Elena.

"Do you have access to old news stories? Like from the 1950's?" Izzy frowned at the girls' request.

"Yeah, at the station. Between the archives and the Internet, we pretty much have everything." He told her.

"I have this report that's way past dueâ€¦you'd be a lifesaverâ€¦" She smiled sweetly at the man.

"I'm heading there now." Logan gestured to the van. "Let's go." He led the girl away but she stopped and turned to her sister.

"If anyone asks: you don't know where I went. I don't want Caroline to know that I left." She said and Izzy's frown deepened.

"Yeah, sureâ€¦I'll cover for you." She called after the girl as she clambered into the news van and they pulled out of the car park. "You're welcome."

Izzy rose from the bench and massaged her temples as she re-joined the crowds at the car wash: everything had been going smoothly now Damon was locked up, but now it seems Elena's decided to be elusiveâ€¦great.

She tip-toed through the student filled area, being careful to not submerge her shoes in the soapy puddles covering the ground, until Bonnie came into view. Sighing in relief that there appeared to be one person here who might know what's wrong with Elena, she began to make her way over to the girl but stopped when out of nowhere, a

puddle burst into flames. She watched in shock as the flames travelled through a small stream of water before engulfing a car. Izzy turned to her attention back to the source of the fire and felt her eyes widen as she saw Bonnie staring intently at it. Within seconds she was at her side and placed a hand on the girls shoulder, effectively breaking her stare.

"Bonnie?"

"What just happened?" The girl asked, panicking as the flames suddenly disappeared as though they'd never existed.

"You were in some kind of trance." Izzy explained to the shaking girl.

"Did I do this?" She whispered, a tear escaping her eyes.

"I think so."

"Nobody else saw, did they?" Izzy shook her head and saw the girl relax slightly.

"Bonnie, I think you need to talk to your Grams." She said gently. "Especially after what happened with the candles at the Lockwood party." She saw the girls eyes widen as she realised this wasn't the first time Izzy had caught her.

"I'm going to goâ€¦now." Izzy nodded as the girl raced off towards her car.

* * *

><p>"We digitized all our archives last year." Logan led Elena into a small room in the news station. "You can pull all the remote footage right up on screen. What is it exactly you're looking for?" he asked her as she sat in front of the computer.<p>

"An incident from 1953â€¦if it even happened." She sighed, now unsure of herself. "At the old Salvatore boarding house?"

"All right, use keywords to search the database. It's pretty easy to navigate. And Brady down in tech will help you out with anything you need." Logan shook the mouse and the screen lit up, allowing Elena to focus on the small white search box.

"Ok." Elena smiled gratefully as he made to leave but suddenly stopped.

"Oh, hey; could you put in a good word for me with Jenna?"

"You got it." She laughed and he left her alone with the archives. She took a deep breath before typing in her query: _Joseph Salvatore + animal attack_.

She watched the small loading icon spin for a second until the page changed to show a match: a video from June 12th 1953. Hesitantly she clicked the link and watched as the video loaded to show a black and white image of man in a bow tie standing outside the Salvatore Boarding house.

"This is Franklin Fell reporting to you from the Salvatore Boarding House, where a brutal animal attack has ended in tragedy." In the background a stretcher carrying a body covered in a white cloth exited the house and was brought to the ambulance beside the reporter. "Ok, they're bringing out the bodies. See if you can get closer." The reporter paused and looked around before pausing. "Is that the nephew?" The camera panned to show a man standing half concealed by shadows. "Look it's the family." The man was joined by another figure: a female.

Elena paused the video and panned it back a few frames before zooming in. She felt a gasp escape her as the bigger image revealed the figures to very closely resemble Stefan and Izzy. She fell back into the seat as the image moved on to show Izzy lean in and whisper to Stefan and slowly point to the camera before taking Stefan's hand and leading him into the Boarding House, her final glance back to the camera confirming that it was in fact the same Izzy currently living with her: same age, same locket, 56 years ago.

* * *

><p>"Have you seen Elena?" Stefan asked after stumbling upon Izzy as she swept the pavements of the school, trying to clear the soapy residue from the car wash.<p>

"No, not for a while." She said, keeping her promise to not tell anyone where the girl had gone.

"You think she went home?"

"Probably." She leant against the broom and sighed. "On a separate note: is Zach answering your calls?" Stefan fished his phone from his pocket and quickly dialled the Salvatore Boarding house but frowned when no one answered.

"Apparently not."

"Stef, I've got a bad feelingâ€|" She ran a hand through her unruly hair. "And I haven't seen Caroline in a while eitherâ€|you don't think heâ€|" She trailed off as Stefan frowned.

"He's not strong enough for a psychic connectionâ€|surely?"

"He said it himself: he's stronger than we thinkâ€|it's possibleâ€|" she mused as they shared a look. The sound of the wooden broom hitting the pavement was all that was left of their conversation as the pair blurred away from the scene and onto the porch of the Boarding House.

They pushed the already open door and stepped into the hallway of the grand house.

"Can you smell that?" She whispered as the unmistakable scent of fresh blood filled her nostrils. She turned and jumped as Stefan's face was already beginning to react to the human blood in the air. "Go see if you can find anythingâ€|I'll follow the scent."

Izzy followed the invisible blood trail to the cellar where she let out a gasp as she halted in front of an unmoving body. She glanced at the brick wall opposite the now open cell, that had only hours ago

housed Damon, and saw a smear of blood shine against the dark bricks and knew that the body hadn't been drained of blood but had instead had its neck snapped as the door had been flung open and Damon had enacted his revenge. She crouched and found a single blonde hair on the stone floor and felt a sigh escape her: Caroline.

She gently tilted the body's head and felt it flop in her hand.

"Oh Zach, I'm so sorry."

* * *

><p>Elena felt numb as she climbed the stairs to her bedroom. She managed a small smile to Logan as he exited Jeremy's room and pointed him towards the right door for the bathroom. She completely missed the fact that he slowly pocketed something on his way to the bathroom.<p>

Sitting on the edge of her bed she felt all colour drain from her as she thought about all that hadn't made sense since the Salvatore's came to town:

Izzy's unblemished hand after Jeremy cut it with a bottle at the football gameâ€|the way Stefan's face changed at the party by the Fallsâ€|The bite marks on Carolineâ€|Vikki telling Matt a vampire attacked herâ€|and the fact that Stefan and Izzy haven't aged a day since 1953â€|

She felt all the hairs on her arms stand on end as it all pieced together. She stood abruptly and fled from the house: she had to know.

* * *

><p>The sun had set by the time Stefan and Izzy had moved Zach and they moved silently around the small room in the cellars that contained a variety of shotguns and other weapons.<p>

"Here." Stefan tossed her a box of wooden bullets which she quickly loaded into the handgun on a nearby shelf. "Ready?" His knuckles were white as they clenched around a thick, wooden stake.

"No." She whispered, the gun feeling unnaturally heavy in her hands. "But we've gotta find him." She turned and stalked from the room, Stefan hot on her heels.

She flung open the front door; gun in hand, ready to track down the vampire now free in the town.

"Izzy?" The female vampire paused as Elena stood, poised to knock on the other side of the doorway.

"Elenaâ€|" She tried to hide the gun behind her but the girl zeroed in on it instantly before settling on the stake in Stefan's hands.

"What are you?" She whispered and Izzy knew that tonight she would not be trapping Damon, no; tonight she would have to finally reveal herself.

"You'd better come in."

End
file.